

example, when looking at defamation in materials published online, he cites the example of a bride's father. In retaliation against a wedding photographer, the father posted photographs with "disparaging captions." These are not oral histories, and the relationship between an interviewer and interviewee differs from that of wedding photographer and client (p. 91).

The lack of relevant cases does not render *A Guide to Oral History and the Law* useless. In our society, examining the law lets us see what actual liabilities we may face. Leaving these issues unexamined may result in needless restrictions on collections. Likewise, ignoring legal issues may hurt an institution in the long run. The ability to address possible legal issues with potential donors can only help an archivist. Waiting until a legal issue confronts the archives is unwise. It is better to have a reasoned and researched opinion. Neuenschwander's clear articulation of ethical standards and their relationship to legal issues fills the gap when there is little or no precedent.

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*City of Somerville Archives*

### **An American Political Archives Reader**

Edited by Karen Dawley Paul, Glenn R. Gray, and L. Rebecca Johnson Melvin. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2009. 477 pp. Hard cover. Available from the Society of American Archivists, \$66.00 members, \$75.00 nonmembers. ISBN 978-0-8108-6746-8.

*An American Political Archives Reader* is an important and long-overdue addition to the growing field of congressional archives scholarship. As the first collection of articles to be published on the subject and composed in large part of new research and scholarship, the volume not surprisingly was honored with the 2010 Waldo Gifford Leland Award for "excellence and usefulness in the field of archival history, theory or practice." Together with *Managing Congressional Collections*, published by SAA in 2008, the *Reader* provides a well-balanced look at the nuanced and sometimes uncertain nature of working with congressional collections. Editors Karen Dawley Paul, Glenn R. Gray, and L. Rebecca Johnson Melvin have gathered an exceptional selection of articles that confers proper recognition to over thirty years of work by dedicated congressional archivists while gesturing toward the future of congressional archives with the inclusion of a number of previously unpublished works.

This volume primarily focuses on collections generated by members of the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate (three articles address collections of state representatives). True to the title, however, the task of documenting Congress requires big-picture collection strategies that encompass the entire population of national political actors, including special interest groups, political

parties and campaign organizations, media, and private individuals. The *Reader* makes this point clear in multiple articles, but Paul emphasizes it in “Documentation of Congress: Summary Report and Recommendations,” as does Faye Phillips in “Congressional Papers: Collection Development Policies.”

Through a mixture of case studies and congressionally focused archival theory, the *Reader* fleshes out many of the best-practice recommendations given in *Managing Congressional Collections*.<sup>1</sup> Both books serve an important purpose; from a practical perspective, *Managing Congressional Collections* provides the essential information needed to complete the physical transfer, process, and provide access to congressional collections. In conjunction, the *Reader* provides the answers to the larger “Why?” questions through case studies, observations, original research, and informed scholarship. The *Reader* thus serves as a valuable informational resource while providing perspectives on many of the less obvious areas of assembling congressional archives.

For example, should a collecting institution seeking congressional records go through the trouble and expense of making connections with its entire delegation early, as some authors recommend, or should it wait until a particular member of Congress has served for a certain number of years, held important committee positions, or initiated important legislation? Another issue the *Reader* explores is the lack of standardization in the way congressional offices keep their records. The *Reader* devotes an entire section to appraisal; however, there is no guarantee that the collection received will bear any resemblance to those discussed. The opinions of the authors differ on the very nature of the archival unit, indicated variously as *congressional papers*, *collections*, *paper collections*, and *records*. As noted by Patricia Aronsson, “Congressional collections are hybrids, neither strictly archival nor personal.”

These types of ambiguities, and how institutions choose to resolve them, depend on the collecting institution and can vary widely depending on collecting scope, staff, and monetary resources; the condition of the collection itself; and, of course, the ever-present political implications of working with political collections. This is precisely why a book such as the *Reader* is so essential—congressional collections sometimes share more differences than they do similarities, and generalized advice can often bring up more questions than answers. *Managing Congressional Collections* demonstrates this point by beginning its chapter on processing with a checklist of twenty-eight questions that affect processing decisions. To make informed decisions, a variety of information is necessary; the background and history of the major organizations affecting congressional archives (a constant theme throughout the *Reader*) and the factors that can

<sup>1</sup> Cynthia Pease Miller, *Managing Congressional Collections* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2008).

affect acquisition decisions are just two examples. Other examples are more illustrative of the nature of congressional collections: making appraisal decisions for single collections that occasionally rival the size of entire repositories and providing descriptions that encourage use but don't jeopardize national security, the privacy of constituents, or the reputation of the donor. The *Reader* addresses all these topics.

The *Reader* is broken down into six parts containing twenty-nine articles. The first article, "Reflections on the Modern History of Congressional History," by historian emeritus of the U.S. Senate, Richard A. Baker, sets the scene for the entire book. This article, adapted from a presentation given to the Association of Centers for the Study of Congress in 2008, traces the development of the field of congressional history from its shockingly late beginnings (the Senate Historical Office was not established until 1975, and the Senate archivist was not made a permanent position until 1984) through important milestones in congressional documentation, such as the broadcast of House and Senate floor proceedings on C-SPAN in 1986 and the 2008 House Resolution "expressing the sense of Congress that Members' Congressional papers should be properly maintained and encouraging all Members to take all necessary measures to manage and preserve their papers."

The first part of the *Reader* is devoted to acquiring political collections and gives three case studies and an overview of collection policies for state legislators' collections in state archives. The discussion of the differing state policies for state legislators' archives indicates that this area deserves more in-depth treatment. (The article is based on a 2005 study and only includes responses from six states; however, it touches on important topics such as the differentiation between the public and private records of legislators and the lack among repositories of formal collecting policies for these records.)

The second, third, and fourth parts of the *Reader* concern the documentation of Congress and the appraisal, arrangement, and description of congressional collections. These sections will provide the most practical benefit and likely most appeal to the archivist currently engaged in work with congressional collections.

"Documenting Congress" is an important section for archivists working exclusively with congressional collections as well as for those who may handle them only occasionally. Senate Archivist Karen Dawley Paul begins this section with her "Summary Report and Recommendations" from the 1992 publication "The Documentation of Congress: Report of the Congressional Archivists Roundtable Task Force on Congressional Documentation" (S. Pub 102-20). This summary provides a big-picture evaluation of the tasks involved in documenting Congress. Aimed not only at archival repositories, but also at Congress itself, the report goes beyond discussions of individual legislators to include

recommendations for documenting administrative functions such as the Clerk of the House and the Capitol Police; Congressional support agencies such as Congressional Research Service and the Government Accountability Office, as well as the papers of political and legislative journalists. Further articles in this section discuss the need for holistic documentation strategies within individual repositories, stressing the importance of oral history and electronic records programs.

The third part deals with appraisal and contains two notable approaches offered by Patricia Aronsson and Mark A. Greene. Aronsson draws on her four years of experience as an archivist on Capitol Hill and provides detailed descriptions of the types of records often found in congressional collections. The final sections of her article, entitled “Redefining Congressional Collections” and “Creating Institutional Alliances,” are thought provoking and will hopefully generate some new discussion within the context of the *Reader*. Greene elaborates further on certain series (invitations, academy files, routine requests, issue mail, and case files) and what he terms an approach that “is more radical than what passes for conventional wisdom.” Included as well is his proposed appraisal policy, which advocates folder-level attention to many of the larger series.

Part four addresses arrangement and description. The stand-out article in this section is “Describing Congressional Papers Collections: A Progression of Access Tools” by L. Rebecca Johnson Melvin and Karyl Winn. The authors properly assert that there is no one-size-fits-all descriptive practice appropriate to collections. Instead, they argue, the level of description should be appropriate to the access tool; what works for your preliminary inventory won’t work for your finding aid and certainly not for your promotional literature. Yet each one of these tools serves an important purpose and can expand “upward” and “downward” to inform both higher and lower levels of description. Larry Weimer provides a compelling argument for the measured application of “More Product, Less Process” (MPLP) to congressional collections in “An Embarrassment of Riches.” Commonly cited roadblocks to MPLP, such as the need for greater description in congressional collections and the possible presence of classified, confidential, or private information, are given a thorough discussion.

The final two parts of the *Reader* are devoted to the topics of building research centers and using political collections. With only three narrowly focused articles, the topic of building political research centers seems deserving of greater attention. Lacking a comprehensive study of political research centers in the United States, it is difficult to gauge the momentum of this field, but it certainly seems as though the trend is moving toward legacy-driven and individual-focused centers despite the current economic downturn.

The concluding part of the *Reader* gives voice to the historians and political scientists who use congressional collections. These articles will surely benefit an archivist lacking a deep background in legislative history or political science.

Historian Nancy Beck Young gives a good analysis of modern political history in "Trends in Scholarship on Congress." Young convincingly argues that political history has been too focused on the executive branch of government. Although archivists don't seem to mind heaping the blame upon themselves for this gap in political history, Young rightly emphasizes the difficulty in researching and studying the entirety of the Congress versus the singular office of the president, saying, "Going to one archive is much easier than the multi-archival work necessary for any good political history of Congress."

The documentation of Congress is a task as rich and varied as the work of the Congress itself. Through a network of organizations such as the Congressional Papers Roundtable of SAA and the Association of Centers for the Study of Congress and through publications such as *Managing Congressional Collections* and *An American Political Archives Reader*, we are moving toward a better and more accessible history of a complex system of governance. The *Reader* provides essential information for archivists working with congressional collections and sets a high standard of quality for those that will follow. As I hope has been made evident here, there is room for more and better research and discussion of many of these topics, especially as we begin to see these collections shrinking in linear feet yet growing exponentially electronically. *An American Political Archives Reader* provides a strong foundation on which to begin that effort.

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### **Archives and Archivists in Twentieth Century England**

By Elizabeth Shepherd. Farnham, Surrey, U.K.: Ashgate Publishing, Limited, 2009. £60.00. ISBN 978-0-7546-4785-0.

The history of archival science has long been neglected in archival literature and continues to be an area sorely in need of development. Elizabeth Shepherd's *Archives and Archivists in Twentieth Century England* provides a firm foundation for further research regarding the basis of an archival tradition. While laying the groundwork for future analyses into the development of archival science in a specific country, in this case England, Shepherd at the same time provides a framework for other regional examinations.

Shepherd is currently a reader at the Department of Information Studies at University College London, teaching courses in the Archives and Records Management program. She has published extensively on archival science in the United Kingdom, and while not clearly identified, the current monograph is most likely an adaption of her doctoral dissertation, *Towards Professionalism?*