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Archives: Principles and Practices by Laura Millar (review)

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Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science, Volume 41,
Number 4, December / décembre 2017, pp. 308-309 (Review)

Published by University of Toronto Press



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Review

Compte-rendu de lecture

Millar, Laura. *Archives: Principles and Practices*, 2nd ed. London: Facet Publishing, 2017, 352 pages. £49.95.

The second edition of Laura Millar's *Archives: Principles and Practices* is a welcome update to an important work. The first edition (2010) was awarded the Waldo Gifford Leland award (Society of American Archivists 2017, para. 1), honouring "writing of superior excellence and usefulness," by the Society of American Archivists in 2011. Millar has made considerable revisions in this new edition, including major changes in the ordering and presentation of material. The structure of the book, along with a glossary and thorough index, will help readers to easily find the section, example, or template that they are looking for. It can be used as a reference without needing to be read cover to cover.

The first section, *Archival Principles*, occupies nearly half the length of the book, and includes discussions of the purposes of archives and the ethical commitments of archivists. This section is possibly more thorough than a practically minded reader may be looking for; at the same time, the section on archival history is notably brief and could be expanded significantly in future editions.

The second section, *Archival Practices*, covers various aspects of day-to-day archival work. The chapters here are *Managing the Institution*, *Preserving Archives*, *Acquiring Archives*, *Arranging and Describing Archives*, and *Making Archives Available*. Each presents the basics of a key archival function in a straightforward way. Recommendations for further reading are given near the end of the book.

One key difference from the first edition is that there is no longer a separate section on digital archives. Digital records concepts are presented throughout the text, rather than as a special topic near the end. For example, the chapter "Acquiring Archives" includes several pages explicitly describing the processes and challenges of acquisition of digital records. After all, most archives are now acquiring and working with, or at least expected to work with, digital records. The section on digital preservation is only two pages: probably a wise choice, as it is nearly impossible for a book to keep up with the changing digital preservation environment. By describing some basic requirements in generalities, Millar avoids having sections like this become obsolete.

A Canadian archivist, Millar has worked to avoid too much focus on any one nation's archival traditions. The fictional examples used to illustrate best practices are general enough to apply nearly everywhere, and the factual anecdotes originate from a variety of places and times.

The intended audience for the work is new professionals and people working in smaller or under-resourced institutions. Students, also, will find this book to be a straightforward reference with helpful examples. The long-time archivist, with the benefit of access to new scholarship, conference attendance, and other professional development, may not find this book as much use.

This is a thorough text, covering all the basics of archival practice. I have taught with the first edition for several years, and am now using this second edition as a required textbook for my students. If you have read the first edition, and have since moved into more advanced work or studies, the updated second edition may not be mandatory. If this is a book you actively refer to, use to teach, or recommend to others, then you will likely find the second edition to be a fantastic and helpful update. It comes highly recommended as a textbook or reference book or as part of an institutional library.

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References

Society of American Archivists. 2017. "Waldo Gifford Leland Award." Accessed November 16, 2017. <https://www2.archivists.org/governance/handbook/section12-leland>