

REVIEWS

Donors and archives: a guidebook for successful programs, by Aaron D Purcell, Lanham, MD, Rowman & Littlefield, 2015, 201 pp., USD\$55.00 (paperback), ISBN 978 0 810892 17 0

The experience of an ad hoc, unexpected donation foisted upon an archives by a donor with unrealistic expectations, of uncertain value yet requiring significant resources to manage, is perhaps more common than many archivists would care to admit. The ability to be proactive and definite about the receipt of donations, and to establish a defined donor program that delivers key benefits to the archives, is at the heart of this detailed look at an often unappreciated area of the archival profession.

Aaron D Purcell has prepared a useful and engagingly written book about donors and archives, offering a comprehensive view of the various elements that make for a successful donor program. Not simply aimed at collecting archives, Purcell defines donations as either voluntary or by law, and the book addresses issues with internal agency transfers as well as external donations, making reference to digital records as well as paper or other formats. The substance of this book is not the contents of a donation, but understanding the complexities of a donor program.

The book is divided into four parts, progressing through what Purcell terms the cycle of donations (p. xxi). Beginning with ‘The Planning’, Purcell addresses donor motivations and looks at deeds of gifts and forms of communications. He teases out the various reasons for a donation, which might include tax deductions or a sense of immortality, suggesting that better understanding these motivations assists the archivist in responding appropriately and strategically. In the second part, ‘The Process’, Purcell offers useful tips for assessing donations and making site visits (including a handy archival kit list), transitioning to processing the donation and working with donors over the long term.

Parts three and four, ‘The Partners’ and ‘The Payoff’, focus on communication strategies and building relationships that ensure the success of the donor program. By looking at donor types in depth, Purcell offers analysis of the broader context of fundraising, and how archives can work successfully with those with a similar investment in donors (such as the development office). He also reviews the role of volunteers in archives. The final part provides advice on organising a donor program, identifying, charting, implementing and sustaining the various elements. Purcell is an advocate for the integral role donations play in the development of an archives program, but recognises the ‘imperfect science’ (p. 191) of donor relations. While acknowledging each donation and donor is unique, Purcell advises that with careful planning and well-thought-out strategies, the value of the donation can be realised for all parties.

One distinctive feature of the book is the use of scenarios to introduce each chapter – some eerily familiar. Purcell is a Professor and Director of Special Collections at Virginia Tech, which holds manuscript collections, rare books and the University Archives. He draws on 15 years of experience with donor programs to illustrate the various topics, which serves to add a touch of lightness as well. There was a sense of anticipation at what scenario each new day would bring!

Purcell’s strength lies in his focus on advocacy and encouraging archivists to be assertive and responsive in working with donors and allied professions such as development officers. Understanding that donations require more than simply a signed deed of gift has been underlooked by the professional literature and archival education programs. Donations are ultimately the result of relationships between people, and, as resources become limited, the value of donors as supporters may become a critical element in sustaining the archive itself.

The book is, however, solidly text based with few visual aids. A more dynamic presentation might have incorporated tables or feature boxes to highlight scenarios to engage the reader. It is also written with a North American focus, including references to US tax laws, so international readers will need to review their own legal requirements at these points. Nevertheless, for professional archivists, those working in collecting archives or with manuscript collections in libraries, this is an informative and unique contribution to the professional literature.

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The Preservation Management Handbook: A 21st-Century Guide for Libraries, Archives and Museums, edited by Ross Harvey and Martha R Mahard, Lanham, MD, Rowman & Littlefield, 2014, xxi + 376 pp., AUD\$95.00, ISBN 978 0 759123 15 1

An essential tool for practitioners, this resource provides the reader with the necessary tools to ensure the provision of a comprehensive preservation management program and assists in the management and prioritisation of the needs of the collection.

The subtitle of the publication, 'A 21st-Century Guide for Libraries, Archives and Museums', implies that it is a relevant resource across issues facing the twenty-first-century professional. Upon reading chapters it seems that the information contained is just as applicable, irrespective of time or age, across all sectors of the galleries, libraries, archives, museums and records (GLAMR) domain. Nevertheless, it would seem that there is a strong focus towards the library and archive sectors, and less for galleries and museums.

The information is as equally useful to those who manage smaller collections. It should be understood that while there are inherent differences across the sectors, this handbook assists in understanding the issues facing preservation of material and objects across all areas within the GLAMR sectors. The reader should also understand and recognise there could be distinctions between collection purposes, visions and directions which result in differences in the attitudes underpinning preservation approaches. The publication does not aim to be a comprehensive and definitive single source of truth, but aims to address the principles and concepts of preservation irrespective of material format.

Using this handbook, cultural heritage and museum professionals, archivists, librarians, records managers and those in allied positions within the information management field can supplement existing specialist knowledge. Covering topics such as climate control, fire safety, pest management and including sections on collection needs, preservation principles, conservation principles for varied media (paper, textile and digital), this publication comprises text for preservation students as well as experienced practitioners alike. In its first few chapters the handbook addresses managing a preservation management program in line with the basic requirements, regardless of collection size or content.

The handbook consists of two main sections. The first covers the groundwork where practitioners and students can gain insight into dealing with managing preservation and preservation issues. The second half of the book contains contributions written by specialist authors and is dedicated to the preservation of various media and material forms.