Personal Archiving: Preserving Our Digital Heritage, edited by Donald T Hawkins, Medford, NJ, Information Today Inc., 2013, 299 pp., USD$49.50 (paperback), ISBN 978 1 573874 80 9

This is a multi-authored work looking at personal digital archiving. It covers a broad range of topics and includes some case studies. It is aimed to appeal to a wide range of practitioners, and the back cover suggests 'genealogists, historians, archivists, librarians, collectors, creators and anyone with a mass of digital information they want to organise and preserve'.

Not surprisingly, depending on the reader, some chapters may be too basic or simply say what is already known and accepted. I found some chapters more useful and interesting than others.

There are 13 chapters with a foreword by Brewster Kahle from the Internet Archive and an introduction by Donald Hawkins as editor. At the end of the publication there is information about the contributors plus a detailed 11-page index.

The chapter authors are mostly based in the United States and are practitioners, consultants and academics. The chapter titles are self-explanatory and include:

- Chapter 1 Personal Digital Archives: What they are, what they could be and why they matter, by Jeff Ubois, MacArthur Foundation;
- Chapter 2 Personal Archiving for Individuals and Families, by Danielle Conklin, Cotton Gloves Research;
- Chapter 3 The Library of Congress and Personal Digital Archiving, by Mike Ashenfelder, Library of Congress;
- Chapter 4 Software and Services for Personal Archiving, by Donald Hawkins;
- Chapter 5 Digital Inheritance: Tackling the legal and practical issues, by Evan Carroll, The Digital Beyond;
- Chapter 6 Social Media, Personal Data and Reusing Our Digital Legacy, by Catherine C Marshall, Microsoft Research, Silicon Valley;
- Chapter 7 Reading Ben Shneiderman's Email: Identifying narrative elements in email archives, by Jason Zalinger, University of South Florida, Nathan G Freier, Microsoft Corporation and Ben Shneiderman, University of Maryland;
- Chapter 8 Faculty Members as Archivists: Personal archiving practices in the academic environment, by Ellysa Stern Cahoy, Pennsylvania State University Libraries;
- Chapter 9 Landscape of Personal Digital Archiving Activities and Research, by Sarah Kim, University of Texas at Austin;
- Chapter 10 Active Personal Archiving and the Internet Archive, by Aaron Ximm, Internet Archive;
- Chapter 11 Our Technology Heritage, by Richard Banks, Microsoft Research, Cambridge, UK;
- Chapter 12 New Horizons in Personal Archiving, 1 Second Everyday, Mykive and Muse, by Donald Hawkins, Christopher J Prom, University of Illinois and Peter Chan, Stanford University; and,
- Chapter 13 The Future of Personal Digital Archiving: Defining the research agendas, by Clifford Lynch, Coalition for Networked Information.

In his foreword Brewster Kahle states that 'between digitising the boxes in our basements, filling hard drives with photos and uploading our videos and emails on cloud services, we are creating a bountiful and disorganised mess of our personal histories' (p. xiii) This publication addresses the problem by bringing together the various approaches to digitising, collecting, preserving and presenting personal archives.

But is Kahle's statement true for all individuals, organisations, institutions and others? I am in the process of digitising my own family history research conducted over the past 40 years and putting it into a 'format' to leave to other family members. Perhaps as an archivist I am more organised than others but I know many of my family history colleagues have very detailed recordkeeping systems for their family history documents, images, memorabilia, both print and digital. Otherwise how would we find anything? Admittedly there are some who are not so organised and we could all probably do better.

My second question revolves around how much do we, as personal archivists, really need to keep, digitise, store somewhere and presumably provide access. Otherwise why keep it? Deciding what to keep and how to organise it are possibly the two critical areas that need to be managed first and this book is not as practical as I had thought it might be. However, some chapters were useful and thought-provoking for my own personal archiving project.

In chapter 6 Catherine Marshall argues that 'most people approach the curation of their digital belongings with a mixture of benign neglect and unrealized plans to do better' (p. 99). Marshall does not believe that people can or will do it for themselves, even with instruction and guidance, and gives three reasons why not:

- disaggregation of the necessary skills;
- trends in personal data storage; and,
- overwhelming tendency towards benign neglect.

I would have probably added that this task is very time-consuming as a fourth reason but Marshall wraps that up in her benign neglect and users hoping for the best. In some ways she might be right as I confess to struggling to identify what I want to digitise and keep in my filing cabinets and print-based photographs, and how I should manage my emails, social media, and digital documents and photographs. It takes time and commitment and I cannot help wondering if today's noted authors are leaving their personal papers to libraries as yesteryear's noted authors did. Do our national library and state libraries already have a plan in place? An Australian perspective would be interesting to read.

I found Richard Banks's chapter 11 useful from a genealogy point of view. Banks inherited his father's computer and his description of being an interloper in his father's computer was apt as he tried to locate personal information as executor of the estate. The files were not organised and did not make sense to him as a visitor, yet his father knew his system and how to locate his files as necessary. This is a situation that many of us with elderly parents will face at some point and I cannot help feeling lucky that my own mother has absolutely no digital footprint.

Anyone new to the concept of personal archiving will find this publication useful. Not all chapters were of interest or relevance to me personally but the chapters cover such a broad range, there is probably something for everyone.

Shauna Hicks
Shauna Hicks History Enterprises