

*space* is a valuable addition to current scholarship and debate and, as such, deserves to be read and appreciated well beyond the Canadian border.

Maryanne Dever

*University of Newcastle*

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**A different kind of web: new connections between archives and our users**, edited by Kate Theimer, Chicago, Society of American Archivists, 2011, xvii + 369 pp., US \$69.95, ISBN 1-931666-39-3

Let us begin by musing on the nature of the task involved in pulling together a paper book about the Internet. David Ferreiro, in his introduction to this compilation of essays, generously calls the book both timely and timeless. While it is certainly timely, I think there is some irony in casting an ageless patina on the active discussion of the evolution of archives that unfolds between these covers.

Although the book is about how archives might take advantage of Web 2.0 tools to get stuff done, attract and engage new audiences through social media and generally move with the times, a broad discussion of the changes brought on by the rapid shift of knowledge from paper to electronic storage is inevitably also present. The book is concerned with attitudes to these changes: the ways in which they can be both embraced and resisted.

The strength of this book lies in the range of institutions, projects and tools that are covered. There are 21 essays from 26 contributors across the English-speaking archival world, which have been brought together by editor Kate Theimer. The book has four major sections, based around the themes of Web 2.0 and outreach, Web 2.0 and archival authority, Web 2.0 and archival management and Web 2.0 and new archival users. A review essay introduces each theme, and the discussion is fleshed out by a number of case studies, where particular projects are discussed and assessed. These are followed up with two essays balancing excitement with caution. The first, by Terry D Baxter, tries to find the point at which we risk throwing out the archival baby with the institutional bathwater. The second, by Randall C Jimerson, asks us to remember the ‘digital divide’: the barriers to entry generated by poverty and lack of access to IT resources. Lastly, a conclusion by the editor summarises the themes raised.

The case studies are a broad cross-section of experiments with Web 2.0. There are discussions on the use of various blogging platforms, YouTube, Second Life, Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and wikis (both in-house and Wikipedia). There is some discussion on creating custom sites, such as the National Archives of Australia’s *Mapping our Anzacs*, and hooking social media into online databases and data standards, such as Encoded Archival Description (EAD). There is an interview section, which canvasses the views of genealogists and representatives from major commercial genealogy sites using online archives and data.

As well as fuelling the conclusions of the larger essays, these cases studies are useful for anyone looking for practical advice. By and large, the studies do a good job of unpacking the nuanced cultures that grow up around any popular online platform. They are also the part of the book that will date most quickly. None of the platforms above are much of a mystery anymore and some of them are, now, rather old hat.

The other half of the book – the section with review essays – draws together themes and conclusions from the individual studies. The first section, on the straightforward use

of social media for outreach, is followed by essays exploring the challenges that widespread adoption of Internet technologies present to traditional recordkeeping practices.

The most direct challenge that Web 2.0 poses to the traditional archive is to the authority of the archivists' understanding of the records. Archives, stereotypically, have not gone in for a user-centred approach. An anxiety about user contributions runs throughout the book, although all contributors come down firmly on the side of inviting those new connections that the book's title promises. The issue is tackled head-on in the second review essay, perhaps the most substantial (and traditional) in the volume, by Elisabeth Yakel, 'Balancing Archival Authority with Encouraging Authentic Voices to Engage with Records'. Yakel attempts both a historical and theoretical context for the challenges to archival authority presented by Internet technologies and explores ways in which those notions of authority might be renegotiated to foster the building of online archival communities. She makes the point that the opening out of the archive is not new; archives have already mostly shed their traditional role of guarding the records from all but a privileged few, and rethinking the nature of the authority of the archivist is the next step along this path.

The case studies supporting this essay look at various projects to crowdsource archival description. Unsurprisingly, this seems to work better for describing items, rather than collections or series. Nevertheless, the process of negotiating contributions develops audiences and communities. What is really useful here is that the authors of these studies have taken care to discuss all aspects of the changes they are making – technical and institutional hurdles and the way they rethink assumptions about their roles and relationships.

Kate Theimer has done an excellent job drawing together a multiplicity of voices, and, on the whole, it is inspiring to see the range of enquiry and experimentation that has been undertaken. Nevertheless, the overall impression is how tentative archival explorations of Web 2.0 are, and how a consensus on the need for change does not seem to have (yet) translated into collective action. While I can put some of this impression down to the structure of the book – the case study format means that for every recommendation, there is a caveat – it is very clear from the book that archives are still conducting these experiments with their communities in isolation from each other.

After reading this book, we are not yet ready to talk about how to expand from an experiment with a few series to cover a large collection, what a fully realised system of interactive finding aids might look like or how archives themselves can build online shared collections. This probably underlines the timeliness of the book. In the 18 months since its publication, we are only just beginning to see the development of online archival systems that are designed from the ground-up to represent both the records and their users.

I note from Kate's blog that she is seeking submissions for two more books on archival management and description, and I trust that these two collections will discuss solutions and approaches that the contributors to this book have foreshadowed. You can use this book, if you need it, as permission to be having those discussions.

Daniel Wilksch

*Public Record Office Victoria*

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