

REVIEWS

Peter J Wosh (ed.), *Waldo Gifford Leland and the Origins of the American Archival Profession*, Chicago, Illinois, Society of American Archivists, 2011. VI + 397 pp. ISBN 1 931666 40 7. US\$62.95

One suspects that even within the United States archives and records community, regrettably, Peter Wosh's admirable anthology will have limited appeal. Seriously, who has any time for, or interest in, archival history? Regardless of its impact in North America, the appeal here in Australia will be microscopic. And yet, at least for this reviewer, it flags several issues relevant beyond a single country, including professional identity and the origins of Western archival development.

Hands up all those who have heard of Waldo Gifford Leland? Well might we ask: who's Waldo? For the moment, all we need to know can be gleaned from the Society of American Archivists' (SAA) information on its many annual prizes, scholarships and fellowships. These include an award in Leland's honour, established in 1959, seven years before his death, to encourage and reward 'writing of superior excellence and usefulness in the field of archival history, theory, or practice' (see <http://www2.archivists.org/governance/handbook/section12-leland>). And the man himself? The SAA states that he authored the landmark volume *Guide to the Archives of the Government of the United States in Washington* (1904); was active in the organisation of the Conference of Archivists in 1909; played a central role in the establishment of the US National Archives; and served two terms as SAA President during the 1940s. Elsewhere, it notes he was, in fact, the Society's second president between 1939 and 1941.

Our identity question troubled even Leland at times. Repeatedly during his career, he was at pains to stress that he had never been an archivist. It was repeated in this volume's reproductions of Leland's own published and unpublished writing, in its oral history transcripts and in Wosh's introduction. Opening his address to the SAA as its president in 1940 ('The Archivist in Times of Emergency'), Leland referred to 'the incongruous position that I, who had never been an archivist, would occupy as president ...' (p. 263). Occasionally he elaborated, explaining that he meant that he never had charge of records, either public or private, adding a second reason (I like to think ironically), namely, that he had never established proper control over his own personal papers.

Part of who Leland was, and why he was important, concerns the times: he made his mark before the SAA existed and during decades when the care, accessibility and known existence of records was poor and knowledge of professional methods even worse. He saw opportunities – and was steered towards them by wise others – to do something about these parlous situations, and he patiently and methodically exploited them. The actual significance of his contribution grew slowly, with, for example, the American Historical Association (AHA), 15 years after his death in 1981, announcing a prize for outstanding reference tools, in order

to honour its life member and secretary between 1909 and 1920, as well as a 'distinguished contributor to bibliographic guides' (see <http://www.historians.org/prizes/AWARDED/LelandWinner.htm>).

The SAA and AHA were blips on Leland's career radar; he was also involved with many other bodies, both national and international, usually in a key executive role. These included the Carnegie Institution, the American Council of Learned Societies, the Franklin D Roosevelt (FDR) Library Foundation and the International Committee of Historical Sciences.

For all this, it hardly matters whether Leland thought he did not qualify as an archivist or if we agree or not. We still seem unsure in the Australian Society of Archivists (ASA) today, and I know a number of senior people who have been in the National Archives of Australia for years who say, quite firmly, that they are not archivists. To be, by common historical agreement, a key player in the actual creation of a national archives and, even more significant, the conduit through which European standards and principles came to the US in the early twentieth century after the Dutch manual was translated into German is a unique combination and deserving of a profession's highest accolade. It also makes the writings on these developments far more interesting than some others that Wosh selected for republishing, such as Leland's 1908 thoughts on photography or even a 1941 paper on historians and archivists in World War I.

The anthology ends with a superb epilogue – 'Where's Waldo Now?' – in effect, a sophisticated reflection on archival history. Every paragraph carries insight. I hope, with the editor's indulgence, a quote from its last paragraph may stand as mine, too:

In recent years, archivists have constructed a useful intellectual history of the profession. A generally accepted canon of published works has emerged, ranging from Sir Hilary Jenkinson through Theodore Schellenberg and Verne Harris, which most graduate-trained North American archivists have absorbed and digested. This intellectual history, however, largely lacks a social component. Archival history remains as much about flawed flesh-and-blood people as about disembodied theories and ideas (pp. 367–8).

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David Giaretta, *Advanced Digital Preservation*, Berlin, Springer, 2011. xxii + 510 pp. ISBN 978 3 642 16808 6. US\$129.00

The editor of, and main contributor to, this book, David Giaretta, started his working life as a theoretical physicist, but has been involved in digital preservation for many years. He was a member of the panel that developed the Open Archival Information System (OAIS) in the late 1990s (now ISO 14721) and is currently Director of the Alliance for Permanent Access (APA). He directed the European Union (EU) funded CASPAR project (Cultural, Artistic and Scientific knowledge for Preservation, Access and Retrieval) 2006–2010 and is currently director of a number of other EU-funded digital preservation projects, namely, PARSE.Insight; SCience Data Infrastructure for Preservation – with a focus on Earth Science (SCIDIP-ES); and the APARSEN Network of Excellence.