

2018

## Review of Creating a Local History Archive at Your Public Library

Emily Gibson

*Hoover Institution Library and Archives*, [ergibson@gmail.com](mailto:ergibson@gmail.com)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/jcas>

 Part of the [Archival Science Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Gibson, Emily (2018) "Review of Creating a Local History Archive at Your Public Library," *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies*: Vol. 5, Article 10.

Available at: <https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/jcas/vol5/iss1/10>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by EliScholar – A Digital Platform for Scholarly Publishing at Yale. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies* by an authorized editor of EliScholar – A Digital Platform for Scholarly Publishing at Yale. For more information, please contact [elischolar@yale.edu](mailto:elischolar@yale.edu).

Phillips, Faye. *Creating a Local History Archive at Your Public Library*. Chicago: ALA Editions, 2017.

*Creating a Local History Archive at Your Public Library* is a how-to manual for public library staff written by retired associate dean of libraries at Louisiana State University and past president of the Society of Southwest Archivists, Faye Phillips. Phillips wrote the book in response to Kathy Marquis and Leslie Waggener's wish for "a manual to aid in the tasks of assembling and managing the most helpful local history collections possible in public libraries" (xii). She seeks to provide "concise, practical guidelines to best practices for the acquisition, access, and care of archival and manuscript formats within public library local history collections" (xii–xiii), while also providing instruction for working with backlogs and cost-effective solutions that bridge the divide between archives and public libraries. Her vast experience in libraries and archives is evident throughout the book, from salient hypothetical scenarios to insightful management tips and recommended resources. However, the core of the book, which focuses on archival processing, omits some key concepts.

In addition to serving as an associate dean of libraries at the University of Louisiana, Phillips has been an archivist at five institutions. She was also the first director of the first county archives in Georgia, where she worked to establish guidelines for future county archives. Her perspective as a manager is one of the book's strongest assets, and detailed, step-by-step instructions for processing recall her varied experience as an archivist.

In-page formatting makes it easy for the reader to choose what information they want to consume and the amount of time they want to spend consuming it. Examples, definitions, and recaps are clearly identified and abundant. Diagrams, tables, and photographs also provide visual aid.

Phillips adeptly defines local history archives and places them within the context of the development of early libraries and the social movements of the 1960s and '70s. Management practices are another topic Phillips handles with skill. Thirty pages examine the importance of mission statements, strategic plans, budgets, priority-setting, collection development policies, and policy implementation. Collections care is covered in thirty pages, and the book ends with a bibliography and index.

Processing guidelines form the core of the book, which spans seventy pages. The guidelines are organized into six steps: appraisal, collection transfer, accessioning, arrangement, description, and access policies. Sample legal forms, policy documents, worksheets, and finding aids are provided, as well as links to successful outreach programs. Scenarios help readers transform abstract ideas into relatable behaviors. For example, in this scenario Phillips guides the reader through the act of accessioning:

Jane Doe, the Local History Librarian, is confronted with materials that were collected or deposited before she arrived. Jane has established accessioning procedures for the archives and manuscript collections received during her time at Everytown Public

Library. James Dotson has similar unaccessioned archives and manuscript collections in the Neighbor Village Public Library Local History Archive. When he first began working, he located a list of collections identified by title, each with an assigned, unique number. [. . .] How do Jane and James proceed to gain control over the unaccessioned collections? They can begin by grouping the items by names of people that, despite appearing in various ways, seem to represent the creators of the materials. (65–66)

Phillips takes pains to bridge the divide between archives and libraries. One example of this is her method of juxtaposing terms defined by the Society of American Archivists (SAA) with equivalent terms defined by the Online Dictionary of Library and Information Science (ODLIS). By juxtaposing SAA's definition of "processing" with ODLIS's definition of "original cataloging," and SAA's definition of "access" with ODLIS's definition of "access policy," the reader gains a nuanced understanding of the similarities and differences that exist between the professions. However, some of Phillips's attempts to bridge the divide would benefit from lengthier discussion. For example, she recommends using existing integrated library systems as a cost-effective way to create access to local history archives, but does not mention the cost-saving features of archival management software, such as its ability to quickly and easily generate and display EAD finding aids. Brief discussions on the pros and cons of open source, proprietary, and hosted archival management software; the benefits of providing access to keyword-rich container lists; and the debate surrounding data silos would help the reader make more informed decisions about how, when, and whether to make the crossover from library to archival methods and technologies.

Similarly, an examination of key archival concepts and texts would improve the reader's understanding of processing. Phillips mentions *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* (DACS) only once, when she comments that "DACS shows how to form the various components of a finding aid, including the collection title, names, etc., which can be correlated with, or mapped to, MARC21" (88). She does not discuss provenance or original order, and limits her discussion of appraisal to a list of criteria found in Richard J. Cox's book, *Managing Records as Evidence and Information*. Nor does she discuss the More Product Less Process method of processing (MPLP), which is surprising given her interest in providing instructions for working with backlogs. She suggests that the average rate of processing could be reduced if physical rearrangement was minimized (88), and describes "minimal processing" (120), but does not mention MPLP by name.

There are many existing processing manuals that are relevant to local history archives in public libraries and cover key concepts and texts. The Society of American Archivists' "Archival Fundamentals" series is well-organized, easy to read, updated, and authoritative. Gregory S. Hunter's 457-page *Developing and Maintaining Practical Archives* is an archival staple that covers all aspects of archival administration and is regularly updated. And there are many good, free online manuals, such as the recently revised Archives Association of British Columbia's "Archivist's Toolkit," and the Getty Museum's "Introduction to Archival Organization and Description."

Whether there is a need for a processing manual specifically for local history archives in public libraries is debatable. After all, all archives are unique and all creators were members of a community. However, Phillips's book stands out among the constellation of archival manuals for its focus on management issues and challenges unique to local history archives in public libraries. By building upon its strengths—for example, by adding sections on methods for advocating for the establishment of local history archives in public libraries and advice for ways of measuring community interest in local history archives, and by providing more information about using archival material in public programming and possible intersections between collection development for public libraries and collection development for archives—*Creating a Local History Archive at Your Public Library* would be a very useful tool not only for local history archives in public libraries, but any archival repository situated inside a larger organization.