

a story that made sense, that allowed a patient the psychic breathing space to live and work until things changed and a new story was needed. Just something that worked, in other words, something that was not the best, because the best was unattainable, but something that was certainly better.

Substitute archives for analysis, and, *mutatis mutandis*, perhaps there is a moral to *Lost in the Archives*. Whatever we make of loss—physically missing, intellectually curious, historically obscure, aesthetically edgy, personally anxious, personally irritated (and the many contributors to the volume hit all these notes)—an archives offers a potential for encounter and discovery that constitutes its continuing value. And both reader and writer experience that with *Lost in the Archives*.

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### **Ethics and the Archival Profession: Introduction and Case Studies**

By Karen Benedict. Chicago: The Society of American Archivists, 2003. 91 pp. Available from the Society of American Archivists, \$24.95 members, \$34.95. non-members. ISBN 1-931666-05-9.

The first thing to say about *Ethics and the Archival Profession* is that it is a needed new archives title that presents forty professional ethics case studies. This may appear to be faint praise, but it is not. As the book's excellent bibliography attests, there are many books and journal papers on various aspects of archival ethics. However, there are very few texts principally dedicated to case study analysis. Thus, the appearance of a high quality, up-to-date offering of cases such as *Ethics and the Archival Profession* is important and an appropriate note on which to begin. This review attempts to evaluate *Ethics* from the perspective of its implied purpose—what it set out to do—(might we also say *context* here?), structure, and content. In addition to cases, *Ethics* includes excellent introductory chapters by Benedict on distinctions between ethics and professional conduct, the impact of ethics on institutional practices, and ethical vs. legal behavior. These preliminary chapters offer a broader context in which to consider professional behavior.

The introduction of *Ethics and the Archival Profession* does not explicitly state the book's purpose. Rather, it offers an excellent short explanation of ethics as a branch of moral philosophy and professional ethics in terms of deontological (the rightness or wrongness of actions) and teleological (the good or bad consequences of choices) approaches to the subject. The author notes that the former approach may be prescriptive (or proscriptive) whereas the latter

analyzes desirable or undesirable results of actions. She uses this discussion to segue into a short history of ethical codes of conduct in the U.S. from the mid-eighteenth-century code of the American Medical Association and the subsequent trend among professional organizations, including the Society of American Archivists, to establish codes in the twentieth century as ethical guidelines for their members. Reading the book, it becomes clear that a principally deontological approach was adopted. The cases refer to the SAA *Code of Ethics*, 1992, in advocating their prescriptions.

Implicit is this purpose: to provide professional archivists with a classroom, workshop or personal reference guide to archival ethics using cases reflecting wide-ranging, practical, and common workplace circumstances that create ethical dilemmas and prescriptions based on interpretations of the principles included in the 1992 SAA code. It presents practical situations that any archivist might have faced or could expect to face, perhaps on very short notice. And it does offer prescriptions (and/or proscriptions) for the circumstances outlined in the cases. Although it might be assumed that most prescriptions were developed in consultation with the 1992 code—or at least would not be in contradiction with it—at least one indicates that the code doesn't cover the situation. Only about 40 percent of the cases actually make reference to the code. To this extent, the book may fall short of part of its implied purpose. This point may be somewhat moot, however, as may be the publication's appendix. The SAA has recently published a significantly different "Draft Revision to SAA *Code of Ethics*" (2004) and has requested comments in time for discussion of the draft at its August 2004 annual conference.<sup>3</sup>

The case approach is a strong point of the book that adds considerably to its usefulness and is important enough to be worthy of further discussion by itself. Tackling professional issues from a case perspective is one of the most effective and potentially powerful ways to teach or learn about ethics in classrooms or workshops as, for that matter, it is for many other conditions with which people come into contact on a regular basis. Stephen Yorke, editor of *Ethics, Lies and Archives*,<sup>4</sup> which includes sixteen short, job-related hypothetical cases, puts it more strongly:

[I]n my experience broad discussions or treating ethics as theory gets nowhere. Unless (of course) the audience has gathered for that purpose and

<sup>3</sup> The existing 1992 Code has thirteen sections and explanatory commentary. It is six times larger in word count, two-and-a-half times larger without the explanatory commentary in comparison to the 2004 Draft Code, <http://www.archivists.org/news/ethics.asp>, which has nine differently organized sections and no explanatory commentary.

<sup>4</sup> *Ethics, Lies and Archives*, Proceedings of a one-day Seminar conducted by the Canberra Branch of the Australian Society of Archivists Incorporated at Becker House, Canberra, Thursday 20 May 1993, Stephen Yorke, Anne-Marie Schwirtlich, and Laurine Teakle, Editors, Australian Society of Archivists, Inc. Canberra 1994.

really *wants* to hear. However, case studies—even if they start slowly—soon actively engage an audience no matter how reluctant initially.<sup>5</sup>

Philosophical and theoretical approaches are important components of any graduate program; but case studies provide a needed practical balance to theory and are likely to be much more appreciated and useful to individuals who have been in the workplace long enough to run into troublesome situations requiring them to make difficult choices in dealings with bosses, clients, or colleagues and in managing records. Cases force the individual to become engaged, to consider like personal experiences, and to make his or her own choices. Remembrances of well-done case studies are also more likely to raise warning flags when individuals are suddenly faced with like circumstances in the workplace that will cause them to go back and review the cases before possibly making an inappropriate decision. Thus, the central focus on case studies is an excellent one for the messages of this book.

It is worth noting that ethics and accountability, while quite distinct subjects, are often linked, and readers will find an excellent complement to this volume in Richard Cox and David Wallace's *Archives and the Public Good*. This powerful pair of books should have a place in any archives and records management graduate program or on the personal bookshelf of any member of the profession.

At ninety-one pages total, *Ethics and the Archival Profession* contains forty very short, typically one- or two-page cases by well-known authors and practitioners. Fourteen were written by Timothy Ericson, eleven by Benedict, four each by Mark Greene and Robert Sink, three each by Mark Shelstad and Leon Miller, and one by Robert Spindler. Nearly all of the cases are based on hypothetical situations in U.S. settings. They predominantly concern manuscript collections management. Some are tested against the 1992 code, which is also included as an appendix.

While at least one of the case studies suggests that the individual consult the SAA for guidance, the book does not discuss how to go about doing this. The SAA Committee on Ethics and Professional Conduct was established to accept written requests for ethical advice and interpretations of its code as well as complaints about alleged ethical misconduct. In 2002, SAA Council charged the committee, which is chaired by Benedict, to propose revisions to the 1992 code.

The purpose of this book, however, was not to question or analyze the 1992 code. Rather, the code is used as a benchmark for the cases. One could argue that doing otherwise might have overly complicated the book. As it is, the reader can go to *Ethics* quickly, look in the appropriate section for cases similar to

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Yorke to R. E. Barry, 16 June 1997, in the author's possession.

what the reader is facing at the moment, and get some fairly straight answers. While the book offers an excellent reference for the person needing quick advice, one hopes that most readers will have studied the book before the fact. In taking the approach it did, *Ethics and the Archival Profession* missed an opportunity to draw attention to areas where the 1992 code may not be as helpful as it could be. For example, when should “whistle-blowing” (a term that archivists have traditionally liked to articulate) become the right thing to do? When, if ever, does it take precedence over avoiding being critical of another archivist or institution or the archivist’s responsibility to his or her employing institution?

The six cases in the *Ethics and the Archival Profession* section on “An Archivist’s Responsibility to His or Her Employing Institution” come down in various ways in favor of the archivist’s institution or another external institution. None address instances in which the archivist’s institution is acting contrary to the “public interest,” a term used in the 1992 code but one that does not appear in the 2004 draft revision, nor suggest how the code might help and what real options the archivist has, including leaving the institution or whistle-blowing. It is my impression that where this question comes up elsewhere in the book, it is couched in terms of the threat that taking such action might present to the archivist’s job and future. Preserving one’s job appears to be a good and sound reason for not challenging the institution, resigning, or blowing the whistle if necessary. The implication seems to be that if one does, she or he is professionally doomed. Yet, it is difficult to imagine, for example, that if any of the authors of the cases in *Ethics* were to take such an action in their own organizations they would have great difficulty finding new and at least equally rewarding positions elsewhere. As with most other professions, archivists establish reputations in their field. Taking appropriate action, even if so bold, would not diminish an archivist’s reputation or employability. On the contrary, it might very well enrich it. Indeed, among the authors of cases in Cox and Wallace’s *Archives and the Public Good*, are examples of professionals who have done just that. Because they were people of high reputation, they have survived, continue to do well professionally, and if anything enjoy higher standing than they did before. Certainly taking on one’s own institution is not to be done lightly, but there must be certain things about what we do that are worth it. We need to speak more often about what those things are in our codes, in our deliberations on them, and in our considerations of particularly troublesome workplace quandaries.

Without a better understanding of how any professional society addresses ethical issues among its own members and takes public stands on sensitive matters relating to its profession, its members, readers of books such as *Ethics and the Archival Profession*, and society more generally are likely to have a dim view of the profession in question. Since many archivists feel that society does in

fact have either no view or a poor view of their profession,<sup>6</sup> this does not seem to be an unimportant criticism of this book.

*Ethics and the Archival Profession* has no index. Benedict must have considered this issue carefully, because she compensated for the absence of an index with an excellently structured table of contents. Despite pagination problems,<sup>7</sup> the table of contents is very effectively organized by key job-related topics that will be very familiar to the archivist and that allow one to quickly focus on a particular kind of issue rather than having to read the whole book again when a crisis arises in which the archivist needs some quick reference material.

Especially in the absence of a rich index, the classification of cases in sections tied to the code was a very good choice for organization of the contents. There are seventeen major headings in the table of contents, such as “Appraisal of Collections and Collection Policies,” “Archivists Responsibility to Employing Institution,” “Copyright,” “Description,” “Ownership of Records,” “Privacy,” and so on. All match up with the thirteen specific sections in the code, some identically. However, some of the cases do not link up with the section headings. For example, the first section of *the book*, “Appraisal of Collections and Collection Policies,” logically is tied to section III of the code, “Collecting Policies.” Yet, three of the cases in that section make reference to section IV of the code, “Relations with Donors and Restrictions.” One wonders why these cases were not included under the table of contents section, “Donor Relations.” Other cases in the “Appraisal of Collections and Collection Policies,” section refer to sections VI (“Appraisal, Protection and Arrangement”), VII (“Privacy and Restricted Information”), and XIII (“Conclusion”) of the code. Only two reference Section III of the code.

In fairness to the authors and to the subject, it may just be too difficult to pigeonhole many ethical situations in such a classification scheme. More often than not, they are multidimensional. This may also speak to a weakness of this particular case approach. But if multidimensionality is the reason, it would have been extremely useful to have included a matrix table showing the case numbers on one axis and the code sections on the other, with “X” marks in each of the intersecting cells for each case. Such a matrix could be very helpful to the reader, even retrospectively on the SAA Web site or as a simple insert with further distribution of the book—all the more so if the cases could be mapped against the draft revision or newly authorized code. At least, the authors of

<sup>6</sup> See findings of “Report on Society and Archives Survey,” by R. E. Barry, 29 January 2003, <http://www.mybestdocs.com/barry-r-soc-arc-surv-report-030129toc.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, the usefulness of the table of contents is somewhat abridged until one breaks the pagination code. Page references of the table of contents are all off by three pages, the same number of pages as the Introduction that the author obviously intended to be in roman numerals. The table of contents shows chapter I as beginning on page 1, but it begins on page 4. The first page of the introduction is page 1. SAA now provides printed sheets with the correct page numbers to paste over the two pages of the table of contents.

the cases might make such an analysis of their own contributions to see the extent to which the problem noted above is due to multidimensionality or simply misplacement of cases.

Apart from the desirable organization of cases by sections linked to the code, there are cross-cutting issues throughout the cases, such as undercutting or being undercut by professionals in other institutions, taking over an organizational mess, conflicting views with one's boss, and so on. These are all highly relevant to the workplace irrespective of profession, and the authors are very forthcoming with specific advice on how such circumstances should be dealt with. This may be an advantage of hypothetical cases and makes *Ethics and the Archival Profession* all the more useful to the practitioner. Perhaps because of the cautions of their ethics codes, archivists are typically reticent in how they say what other archivists should have done in real situations. Yet, it is this very kind of advice that people seeking help badly need.

Benedict's treatment of the legion Union Bank of Switzerland case in her opening chapter on "Ethics Versus Professional Conduct," departs from the hypothetical cases and speaks to a very real one concerning the destruction of litigious World War II "Nazi Gold" bank records. Benedict shows how a good lawyer could make a case getting each of the players off the hook whatever course they followed. This risks leaving the reader with the surely unintended view that any behavior—any choice—can be successfully defended. Unfortunately, in the increasingly litigious world in which we live that characterization may too closely reflect the real world.

There are about a dozen footnotes in the introductory chapters of the book. Not surprisingly, the majority of the text, which is case studies, has no footnotes. To compensate for this, *Ethics and the Archival Profession* contains an extensive bibliography at the end of the book, which should be a very useful resource for educators, students and others doing research on ethics.

Perhaps if more business and government organizations formally adopted national association ethical codes for recordkeeping practices, ethical quandaries would arise less often than otherwise they might; and where they did arise, it would make the manager's and archivist's jobs much easier in dispassionately deciding on the most ethical course of action. An important lesson that this reviewer learned from this book is that in future consulting I will not only recommend that organizations adopt established professional standards for the organization's recordkeeping regime and software functionality in its organizational policies, but I will include similar recommendations for codes of ethics. For organizations implementing the Sarbanes-Oxley Act and other Securities Exchange Commission requirements for the establishment of internal whistleblower facilities and internal information controls, or even as part of their audit policy, the manager of the archives and records management unit might recommend that adoption of such a code be done as part of that package. More

needs to be done on the *preventive* or *defensive* aspects of ethics to stave off ethical quandaries where possible. That is surely one of the overarching lessons of these cases.

The cases in *Ethics and the Archival Profession* have been authored by an impressive array of highly regarded professionals, and they are both well written and cover real-life conditions that could arise with any archivist. As noted earlier here, they are almost entirely oriented toward archivists dealing with manuscript collections—about 10 percent are oriented to state, university, or private sector archives. Although the situations largely have relevance beyond manuscript archivists and curators, the book might have been seen to be of greater relevance had there been greater balance in the case venues. But archivists in local, state, provincial, and national governments, and indeed in the private sector, should not so misjudge the relevance of this book to their own workplaces and daily decision making. The bottom line is that ethical dilemmas are universal in the archives and records management world, and professionals need to know how to address them. In this, *Ethics and the Archival Profession* hits the mark well and fulfills important roles in formal and continuing education programs and as a quick reference tool.

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### **Thirty Years of Electronic Records**

Edited by Bruce I. Ambacher. Lanham, Md. and Oxford: The Scarecrow Press, 2003. xix, 190 pp. Available from the Society of American Archivists, \$36 members, \$42 nonmembers. ISBN 0-8108-4769-8.

The clearly stated purpose of *Thirty Years of Electronic Records* is to sing the praises of the custodial electronic records program at the National Archives and Records Administration over the past thirty years and make publicly known both its struggles and accomplishments. This book does an admirable job of celebrating, enlisting prominent figures (prominent both within NARA and the larger archival community) to contribute twelve essays. They document the important work that was completed, share anecdotes about interesting solutions to technical problems, grumble about recurring budgetary problems, and outline hopes and plans for the future. There is just cause for such celebration, especially considering all that has been accomplished by these people and the obstacles they overcame. The book testifies to a seemingly constant flux of staffing and budgetary constraints imposed on the archives