



## Book Review

# Archives for the Lay Person by Lois Hamill

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*Archives for the Lay Person: A Guide to Managing Cultural Collections* by Lois Hamill can be a useful manual for local history organizations with significant archival collections. Many small organizations and historical societies do not have an archivist on staff, or for that matter, any staff. *Archives for the Lay Person* will be most useful to those institutions. Hamill, an archivist at Northern Kentucky University, writes a very basic and precise handbook laying out the core principals of archival practice and how to carry them out with your collection.

Hamill begins by providing a short chapter giving a little background and definitions of basic concepts like *archives*, *records*, and *manuscripts*. The book then covers a variety of topics that follow the process of taking care of an archival collection, from accepting the material, through organizing and describing it, storing and caring for material, and using the material for researchers and exhibits. Hamill also gives detailed, illustrated instructions for documenting many of these processes using PastPerfect software, which will be extremely useful for orga-

nizations that have the software, but can be easily skimmed over by readers who find them less relevant to their own situation. With or without these diagrams and instructions, these chapters give archives techniques to arrange and document their collections according to current professional archival standards.

Hamill also provides a wealth of examples of documentation best practices, which can be used even without PastPerfect. The book has three indexes worth of sample policies, forms, and examples of finding aids, file structures, and much more. These samples come from real archives, so readers can see how the concepts Hamill discusses have been put into practice by other institutions. Implementing these types of forms help archives stay organized and make them easier to use, but, as Hamill emphasizes, many of them are also important for legal reasons, such as a Deed of Gift properly denoting ownership and copyright notices to researchers.

*Archives for the Lay Person* also covers best practices for storing, handling, and preserving collections, including two chapters on photographs, advice on what kinds of materials to use for preservation, disaster preparedness, a little information about other kinds of objects (ones found less often in archives), and knowing when

to call in outside experts. These sections, like many others in the book, also include rich bibliographies and “further reading” lists, a useful tool if your organization needs more detail on a topic. Hamill even includes advice on how to find experts in particular preservation fields and an appendix of trusted vendors of archival grade materials if you don't know where to start looking for folders and boxes.

Hamill's book is written with a specific audience in mind: the small archives, historical societies, and local history organizations that want more background and advice on the best ways to build and care for their collections. For those organizations, *Archives for the Lay Person* is an invaluable resource and reference book. Although some of the specifics may need to be adapted for your institution's collection, the basic principles outlined will be a major help in shaping your work. If you want to make sure you're doing things “the right way,” this book should be on your shelf.

Hamill, Lois. *Archives for the Lay Person: A Guide to Managing Cultural Collections*. New York: AltaMira Press, 2013. ■