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Review of Planning New and Remodeled Archival Facilities

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PLANNING NEW AND REMODELED ARCHIVAL FACILITIES. Thomas P. Wilsted. Chicago, Illinois: Society of American Archivists, 2007, 194 pp., ISBN 978-0-8389-1034-4, soft cover, \$49.00 (SAA member price \$35.00).

My institution is not building a new archival facility and it is unlikely that we will engage, in the near future, in any significant remodeling of the special collections area that houses our most precious materials. However, despite this situation, when I received a review copy of Thomas Wilsted's book, I was immediately drawn to it. Why? Because my library does hold valuable, fragile materials that, as the director, I feel compelled to provide with the best environment that I can, in order to preserve them for future generations. I was hoping that this book would provide something of value for the situation that I am in, as well as for those fortunate institutions that are building new facilities or engaging in extensive remodeling. I am delighted to report that this volume holds value for any institution that owns precious materials and is concerned about preserving them for future generations.

The organization of *Planning New and Remodeled Archival Facilities* is linear and that organization makes it easy to dip into wherever the reader is interested. The author begins, after a general introductory chapter, by assuming that the reader will be building a new, stand-alone facility. Thus, he starts with a discussion of the building site and the structural building elements needed in a new building such as a foundation, walls, and windows and moves to the determination of desirable functional room spaces and exhibit areas. From there he goes on to discuss the design of a building program and how to work with architects and contractors. The final chapter also relates more to the management of a brand new or remodeled, stand-alone archival facility, than to a facility attached to a larger organization.

The middle chapters, 6 through 10, will be of value to anyone with archival paper materials or content stored in other fragile formats such as photographs or on magnetic media.

Chapter 6 covers the latest scientific information concerning the role of temperature and relative humidity within the context of the geographical location of the materials and the facility. Most librarians probably know that controlling temperature and humidity are important, but may be unaware of the range of values that different formats require. Given the rising cost of energy, not to mention the increasing concern that energy not be wasted, Wilsted provides access to research and the insight necessary to create the optimum environment in the most ecological manner possible.

Chapter 7 is also valuable to anyone charged with preserving fragile materials as it covers creating a safe and fire-resistant environment. From smoke detectors to fire suppression systems, Wilsted covers the pros and cons of all of the systems currently available on the market. This information is then followed by how to protect precious and valuable materials from theft, while still making the materials available for users.

Chapter 8 focuses specifically on those who are considering a major renovation of an existing space and chapter 9 covers the purchase of equipment. Of special interest to a more general audience is a section on archival storage, primarily shelving. This covers how to estimate the amount of shelving needed for different types and sizes of materials and the pros and cons of static versus mobile shelving. Chapter 10 covers moving the collections, furnishings, and offices into a new or remodeled facility and may be of interest beyond the archival community. Four appendices complete the work. Appendix 1 lists new and remodeled facilities since 1990, appendix 2 is a glossary of building and construction terms and acronyms, appendix 3 lists archival and library moving specialists, and appendix 4 provides building equipment suppliers and services. These are followed by a comprehensive bibliography and index.

All in all, I found this to be a very interesting and useful discussion of the housing and storage needs of archival and special collections materials. The first chapter set the stage for me in many ways. As Wilsted points out, archival facilities must meet many goals. They must “maintain an environment that slows collection deterioration resulting from excessive light, temperature, humidity, or air pollutants. Archival buildings must be designed to prevent theft, detect and extinguish fires, and protect materials in the event of a flood or earthquake.” Although these are the primary topics of this work, Wilsted also talks about designing archival facilities to meet the needs of the public—a public that is showing more interest than ever in the content of our special collections as they are exposed via digitization. As Wilsted states, “online accessibility creates more user demand with researchers and media representatives...” and often brings new users into the archives to examine the physical item. While access and use of content continues to be a library specific mission, the rising interest in the book (and other media) as “artifact” is bringing the interests of museums, libraries, and archives closer together. In other words, there is much in these 194 pages for professionals from each of these fields.

Recommended.

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