Book Reviews

Archivaria

Privacy: A Short History. DAVID VINCENT. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2016. viii, 187 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-7113-0(pb).

The title of David Vincent's new book is succinct yet deceptive. This is, indeed, a short book on the history of privacy. However, as the author points out, privacy has a very long history, going back well beyond the famous 1890 Warren and Brandeis article in the *Harvard Law Review*, which precipitated the development of an invasion of privacy tort, and certainly further back than Jeremy Bentham's notorious Panopticon of a century earlier. Anyone expecting a dry, legalistic study of privacy rights and laws would be well off the mark. Even those of us in the privacy business cannot help but be surprised at the sheer breadth of the concepts encompassed by this one small word as explored by Vincent. As information professionals, we naturally think of privacy in terms of protection of personal information; however, privacy professionals define four classes: bodily privacy, territorial privacy, communications privacy, and information privacy.[1] Without necessarily naming them as such, Vincent addresses privacy in all of these areas.

David Vincent is a social historian associated with Keele University and the Open University in the United Kingdom. He has written extensively on literacy, privacy, and secrecy, mostly focused on 19th-century Britain and Europe. It is not surprising, then, to find that this short volume is primarily a history of privacy in England, with rare forays into other parts of Europe and North America. Canadian content is limited to two references to New Brunswick native David Flaherty, a former British Columbia information and privacy commissioner, who wrote the first monograph on the history of privacy in 1972 (albeit on the subject of colonial New England).[2]

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1   See International Association of Privacy Professionals (IAPP), "Glossary of Privacy Terms," accessed 18 June 2016, https://iapp.org/resources/glossary.

2   David H. Flaherty, Privacy in Colonial New England (Charlottesville, NC: University Press of Virginia, 1972).

Despite the geographic limitations, there is much to learn from this broad social history of privacy. The book starts somewhat arbitrarily in medieval times, around 1300, and finishes in the digital world of 2015. This is no march of progress; rather, as Vincent says, "There are no beginnings in this history, only threatened endings" (p. 2). Privacy has existed in all eras, at least in the sense of a withdrawal from public scrutiny. Three motivations for this search for privacy are just as relevant today as have always been: "There was the nurturing of intimate relations whose conduct required a realm of protected discourse. There was the search for an inner sanctum where individuals could manage their mental archive and conduct their bodily functions. And there was the defence of thought and behaviour from invasion by external structures of authority" (pp. 2–3). In the course of exploring these motivations, Vincent touches on elements of demography, including family size, and the rural/urban dynamic; housing, including room design and the changing use of spaces, both interior and exterior; pastimes, such as reading, diary writing, rambling, and driving; and the development of communications technologies, including newspapers, gossip rags, postal mail, and the telephone.

One theme of particular interest to archivists is the connection between records and privacy in the private sphere. Here, Vincent elaborates on the concept of "virtual privacy," as "the use of the communications technology of the era to extend the realm of affective relations" (p. 18). These are our private manuscripts or personal archives: personal correspondence in the form of letters, telegraphs, emails, and text messages enabling individuals living in crowded households to develop and maintain intimate relations, both licit and not, with someone either inside or outside of the household. "The written message was the substitute for the distant body" (p. 18), says Vincent, summarizing the key point of the first English-language manual on letter writing, published in 1571. Vincent weaves together vast social trends to situate records in their historical context. Speaking of the Victorian era, he says, "The state's concurrent investment in both elementary schools and cheap postage was of a piece. Literacy would facilitate the writing and reading of letters, and in turn the awakening appetite for correspondence would create a demand for schooling" (p. 67). He furthermore appreciates the interplay between form and function as exemplified in this insightful and amusing diplomatic analysis of the Valentine's Day postcard:

On Valentine's Day 1850, Charles Dickens looked in through a window of the central London Post Office at Mount Pleasant and marvelled at 'those silent receptacles of countless millions of passionate words, for ever pouring through them like a Niagara of language, and leaving not a drop behind'. Most of the passionate words were mass-produced doggerel. The ease of purchase and the accessibility of the mail were creating a disjunction between text and emotion. The cards were not descriptors but signs of affection, their standardized form creating, or forever frustrating, the possibility of subsequent intimate discourse.

Would Dickens find our own era much different?

What Vincent terms "epistolary anxiety" is another example of continuity throughout the centuries. There has always been a fear that personal correspondence will fall into the wrong hands, or will be opened and read by authorities, and measures have been taken to prevent such surveillance, whether in the form of laws regulating letter carriers and Internet service providers, or by physical means, such as sealing envelopes and using cryptography.

Although there are many continuities throughout the ages, over time there has been a fundamental shift from situating privacy as a social concept – where life was lived amid large families, domestic servants, and the crowd of fellow citizens in open spaces – to regarding it as an individualistic one in our increasingly closed and solitary lives. This shift was captured in the well-known formulation of privacy pronounced in 1890 by Samuel D. Warren and Louis D. Brandeis in the *Harvard Law Review* as "the right to be let alone." The spark of their concern was an increasingly prurient press that paired yellow journalism with cheap photography, and it led to a new personal right of action for the invasion of privacy. It is this personal dynamic that best accounts for the rise of that class of privacy with which we information professionals are best acquainted: the modern information privacy movement, or data protection movement as it is known in the UK and Europe. The rise of bureaucracy in the 19th century, which resulted in the drive to document data and compile compendious files on citizens for both regulatory and social welfare purposes, met head on with technology in the 1960s and '70s, leading to the real possibility of a surveillance state. In 1972, the *Report of the Committee on Privacy*, known as the Younger Report, was published in the UK to address the threat to privacy from computer processing of huge data banks. Similar kinds of studies were being conducted in the United States and Canada. The first data protection law was passed in Sweden in 1973, followed in rapid succession by data protection legislation, or privacy acts, across Europe and North America. The shift from societal benefit to private right continues to inform our current debate on the value of state intervention in our daily communications. Says Vincent, "Placing too much emphasis on protecting the personal archive has made it more difficult to define a 'reasonable expectation of privacy'. It has set up aspirations to anonymity and informational autarky which in the past have been neither feasible nor attainable" (p. 137).

Readers of this review will already have noticed that one interesting aspect of this book is the author's use of the word "archive." There are some two dozen references to the term: the "personal archive," the "domestic archive," the "literary archive," the "mental archive." This is not our traditional understanding of an archive(s) as a body of historical records or the archive(s) as place where such records are deposited. Nor is this the postmodern archive of 20th-century French philosophers. Rather, Vincent's "archive" seems to refer simply to a collection of intimate knowledge, of confidential facts, whether

inscribed on a medium or on the mind, and which ultimately requires privacy. At least that is true for the most part: in some circumstances, he seems to mean just a big collection of something, as in his statement that one 18th-century London-based author "possessed a bottomless archive of performing characters but could never identify an actor" (p. 32). At other times, he means archives as we know them: a collection of records.

I have only scratched the surface of Vincent's wide-ranging book, and that is one of its drawbacks: it feels at times as if we are making a breathless dash through a vast swath of social history. Too often the author summarizes texts in so succinct a fashion that big statements are left unexplored, with simply a footnote to direct the reader to whole volumes on the topic. However, as a primer, pointing to a much larger literature, which is the author's explicit aim, the book cannot be faulted. It says much about the intersection of records, communications technologies, and privacy in the Western world throughout the centuries and, as such, is a valuable reference tool for archivists and other information professionals. My suggestion is to romp through it once, then go play in the bibliography.

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Encyclopedia of Archival Science. LUCIANA DURANTI and PATRICIA C. FRANKS, eds. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015. x, 454 pp. ISBN 978-0-8108-8810-4.

The *Encyclopedia of Archival Science* is described by its editors as "a foundational reference work" (p. ix). Since reference works are those in which we seek authoritative facts and information, generally through brief or occasional consultation, the *Encyclopedia of Archival Science* certainly fits the bill. But any encyclopedia, at least etymologically speaking, has a loftier pedagogical goal: to contribute to a round education *(enkyklios paideia)*. And from this pedagogical perspective, the book here reviewed is an excellent and very timely contribution. Instructors for archival courses will undoubtedly find in it articles that can be very conveniently used to introduce important subjects and concepts in the classroom.

This is the first contemporary encyclopedia that focuses exclusively on archival science. The existing *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Sciences*, 3rd ed. (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2011) deals with archives as part of the larger universe of the information sciences, and although its entries are longer, they are limited to only a few of the central archival functions, specialties, institutions, and concepts.