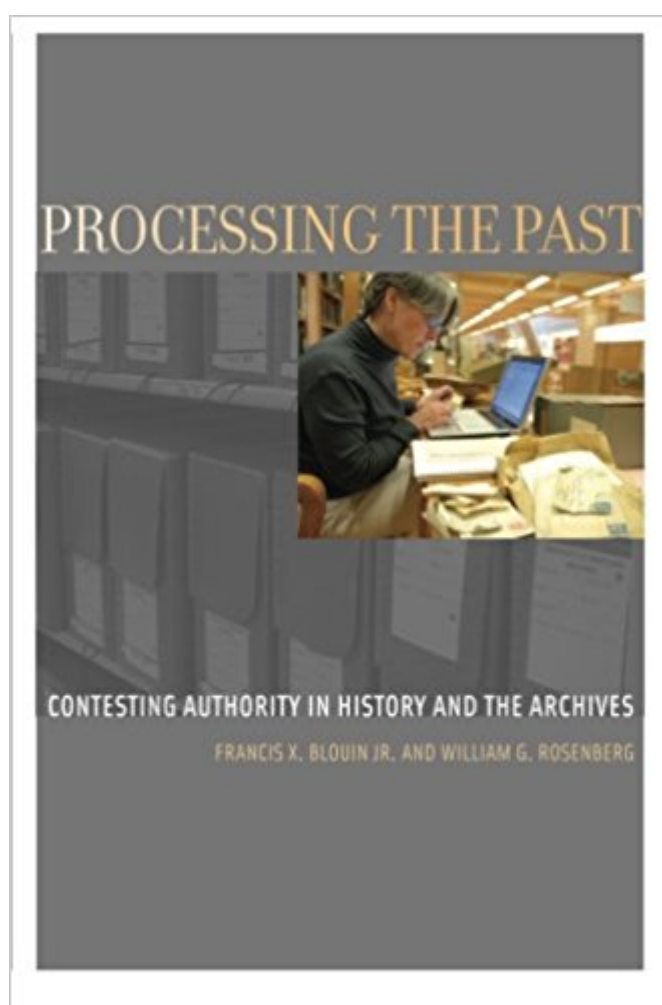


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# Processing The Past: Contesting Authority In History And The Archives (Oxford Series On History And Archives)



## Synopsis

Processing the Past explores the dramatic changes taking place in historical understanding and archival management, and hence the relations between historians and archivists. Written by an archivist and a historian, it shows how these changes have been brought on by new historical thinking, new conceptions of archives, changing notions of historical authority, modifications in archival practices, and new information technologies. The book takes an "archival turn" by situating archives as subjects rather than places of study, and examining the increasingly problematic relationships between historical and archival work. By showing how nineteenth- and early twentieth-century historians and archivists in Europe and North America came to occupy the same conceptual and methodological space, the book sets the background to these changes. In the past, authoritative history was based on authoritative archives and mutual understandings of scientific research. These connections changed as historians began to ask questions not easily answered by traditional documentation, and archivists began to confront an unmanageable increase in the amount of material they processed and the challenges of new electronic technologies. The authors contend that historians and archivists have divided into two entirely separate professions with distinct conceptual frameworks, training, and purposes, as well as different understandings of the authorities that govern their work. Processing the Past moves toward bridging this divide by speaking in one voice to these very different audiences. Blouin and Rosenberg conclude by raising the worrisome question of what future historical archives might be like if historical scholars and archivists no longer understand each other, and indeed, whether their now different notions of what is archival and historical will ever again be joined.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Blouin and Rosenberg have once again joined forces to write what is very like a total history of the modern western archive. From lust to dust to techno-rust, they detail the convergences and divergences of historical authority and archival practice, providing a sweeping and deeply researched account of the impact of political and technological change on archives past, present and future. As indispensably, the authors narrate the tectonic shifts we in the last few generations of historians and archivists have lived through without, perhaps, fully realizing the revolution under our feet - and under our fingertips as well. Both genealogy and prophecy, this book is a must read for anyone who cares about what history is and what it will be beyond our lifetimes." --Antoinette Burton, editor, *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*"

*Processing the Past* provides a compelling and well-illustrated analysis of the growing divergence between archivists and historians. Blouin and Rosenberg will generate constructive reflection and discussion with this substantial work of scholarship. They will help the community take a step towards bridging the gap between humanists and those who would serve their needs." --Roger C. Schonfeld, Manager of Research, Ithaka S+R, and author of *JSTOR: A History*

"*Processing the Past* is a stellar work of historiography and archival history that succinctly tackles the major methodological and theoretical underpinnings of these two professions [i.e. archivist and historian] as well as the transformations that have occurred over the past 150 years." --Archival Issues

Francis X. Blouin Jr. is director of the Bentley Historical Library and professor in the history department and School of Information at the University of Michigan. From 1984 to 2004 he led an effort to do a complete inventory of the archives of the Vatican. He has served on the board of the Council on Library and Information Resources. William G. Rosenberg is Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Michigan. He has authored, co-authored, or edited some thirteen books on Russian and Soviet history. His interest in archival issues developed from his responsibilities as vice president for research of the American Historical Association. He has also served as president of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, and is a vice chair of the board of trustees of the European University at St. Petersburg.

This book makes excellent points comparing the roles of historians and archivists in the shaping of social memory. However, why.... for the love of God, are there no real page numbers? This is one of my class texts, and following along using Kindle's arbitrary location system is murdering my fingers. Please, gods of Kindle, let us have an update soon with page numbers, or give us a list of where each page corresponds to each location.

About half the book was worth reading unless you are completely new to studying history.

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