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## **Book Review: *Archivists, Collectors, Dealers, and Replevin: Case Studies on Private Ownership of Public Documents***

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*Archivists, Collectors, Dealers, and Replevin:  
Case Studies on Private Ownership of Public Documents*

Elizabeth H. Dow. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2013. 144 pp. ISBN 978-0810883772

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*Archivists, Collectors, Dealers, and Replevin: Case Studies on Private Ownership of Public Documents* is an excellent resource for archival students, educators, historians, collectors, and any audience with an interest in archives. Starting with an historical review of collecting institutional and government documents and the development of the archival tradition in the United States, the author examines all aspects of the problems straddling the archival profession. The book allows the reader to easily follow the role of archivists in issues such as protection from loss through theft and neglect as well as archival conflict arising from the existence of public documents in private hands. The reader can learn about the replevin issue associated with displaced government documents in the United States through real-world case studies.

The author, Elizabeth H. Dow, is a professor at Louisiana State University and author specializing in Library and Information Science with an emphasis on archives. She has been contributing to the archival profession and improving archival education throughout her career. In addition to serving as an educator, she has also coordinated the Archival Education Collaborative, which provides partner schools with the benefits of sharing faculty in archives management.

The book is divided into eight chapters. Opening with the history of archival practice in collecting of and caring for historical documents, the work progresses through the tales of theft, neglect, or deliberate disposal; the history of archives and the archival profession; aspects of collecting as both a private and an institutional activity; a general analysis of state and federal statutes on public documents in private hands; the perspectives of the various parties in the struggle; and a series of case studies developed to evoke the complexity of these conflicts. The last chapter concludes with steps that holders of public documents can take to avoid conflicts, as well as steps that archives can take to protect its collections.

The construction of the book meshes successfully with the study of conflicting viewpoints of the legal situation for institutional and government documents. The author supplies an in-depth analysis of various aspects of historical government documents in the United States, as well as the role of the archivist in protecting documents from loss through theft and neglect. The book illustrates problems of missing or misplacing historical documents, while discussing an objective view of the problems and issues associated with the loss of these documents. The case studies,

which are developed to evoke the complexity of archival conflicts, engage the reader in discussion on issues arising from the ownership of public documents in private hands. The reader can employ real-world practices to explore his/her own thoughts on the cases while considering questions within a text, rather than directly answering them. The questions include: *Is this a public document? Is there any evidence that an archive ever held it? What's the historical value of the item? Can the State Archivist prove that it was stolen? Can the holder prove the right to hold it? What negotiating latitude do the state laws give the State Archivist? What negotiable solutions can you think of; what can the State Archivist do; what can the holder do? How would this case be different if the State Archivist and the holder did not live in the same state? How would this case be different if they both lived in one of the other states?* Respecting the readers' viewpoints, the author observes and offers her thoughts on each case as one of the ways to address the problems.

In summation, *Archivists, Collectors, Dealers, and Replevin: Case Studies on Private Ownership of Public Documents* appeals to a wide range of readers with an interest in the area of archives or a passion for protecting historical documents. The author's enthusiasm for and knowledge of the aspects of a complicated legal situation for archival documents are apparent throughout the volume. The book offers readers some of the best scholarship in this area, and the author's insight into the replevin issue, in particular, are a valuable contribution to the field.