

## Book Review

### Roy, L., Bhasin, A. and Arriaga, S.K. (eds.) 2011. *Tribal Libraries, Archives, and Museums - Preserving our Language, Memory and Lifeways*. Lanham: Scarecrow Press. 247 pages.

Reviewed by Tharron Bloomfield\*

At the basis of any tribal library, archive or museum is the desire to reclaim and preserve cultural identity. In the 25 chapters of this book 26 contributors discuss how a variety of institutions and organizations in the United States conduct work to preserve tribal identity.

The book is in four sections. The first section discusses the context of tribal libraries amongst other things discussing their establishment and outlining some of the political and financial issues. The theme of retaining and preserving language and oral tradition is strong. The second section of the book describes functions of tribal information centers, with an emphasis on the services they provide indigenous communities. The third section examines the functions and collections of tribal archives. The final section of the book looks at issues facing the person working in a tribal library or archive. Discussions on issues such as strategic planning, advocacy, time management and accreditation show the growing professional practice in tribal libraries.

Despite the title the book has a clear focus on libraries. The preface does not mention museums at all and only one of the chapter's deals specifically with a case study from a museum. Although it is true as Robert Sidney Martin suggests in his Introduction that there has become a "blurring of boundaries" between libraries, archives and museums, this point may have been made more apparent if there were more contributions from people involved with tribal museums. More examples of the unique challenges of collecting, exhibiting and conserving indigenous objects in a "museum" environment would have blended well with the chapters on the context of the tribal library.

The major contributor to the book is Dr Loriene Roy. In addition to authoring or co-authoring seven of the chapters she is the book's co-editor. Roy is Anishinabe, enrolled on the White Earth Reservation, a member of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe as well as a Professor in the School of Information at the University of Texas at Austin. As such she is well placed to speak with authority from both an indigenous and professional perspective.

Roy's chapter *Weaving Partnerships with the American Indian Peoples in Your Community to Develop Cultural Programming* shows her ability to blend professional and tribal perspectives. Her discussion on *How do we refer to Native Peoples?* highlights the complexity in understanding indigenous cultures for many people. Just what should we call *them*? Native Americans? Indigenous? First Nations? Ndns? The commonsense response Roy gives to this and other well-meaning questions gives an insight into the issues a native librarian routinely deals with.

Underpinning the book is a distinctive indigenous voice. It is one that will be familiar to anyone who is, or has spent time with Natives. There is humor, for example in a chapter on time management Roy somewhat mischievously suggests putting off visitors who continually interrupt your working day by offering them routine tasks whenever they arrive for a chat. There are also some feisty words. In describing the architecture of some Tribal Cultural Centers, American Indian architect Sam Olbekson states (p. 74):

This (architectural) practice has resulted in a visual landscape of sprawl, tacky decoration, stereotypical imagery, and culturally vacant structures... Native architecture has frequently been reduced to the equivalent of culturally diluted trinkets and chicken-feather crafts sold to unsuspecting tourists.

Critiques such as these show an important responsibility of the indigenous professional - to identify practices that do a disservice to indigenous people and challenge them.

Several writers define and discuss how a tribal institution differs from other libraries, archives and museums in our communities. There are also discussions on the nature of collaboration and consultation between indigenous and non-indigenous communities, a recurring and complex issue in the preservation of indigenous material. Native Hawaiian librarian Kawika Makaanani has the following to say regarding the role of non-indigenous colleagues (p.39):

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While indigenous people are rightly wary of outsiders, we need to acknowledge that some have contributed to our survival and endured their own hardships in doing so. Although their own people caused great harm, they collected and preserved traditions that might have been lost forever... Nevertheless, it is the responsibility of such selfless individuals to consider that their best work will be to train and prepare native peoples to conduct such work for themselves.

The authors' experiences span the United States. There are case studies of tribal libraries in California, Oklahoma, Alaska, Hawai'i and other states. Although geographically different the case studies discuss similar themes and issues. While the chapter on *International Efforts in Supporting and Advancing Library Services for Indigenous Populations* looks at international collaborations amongst indigenous librarians, there are no contributions from indigenous people outside the United States. A chapter contributed by a First Nation Canadian, Maori, Sami or

Australian Aboriginal colleague would have added value and allowed the reader a greater insight into the similarities and differences between indigenous people from different parts of the world. Perhaps this shows there is room for a future publication looking at tribal libraries, archives and museums from a global perspective.

A challenge for the author on any indigenous topic is to appropriately address their audience. A "how-to" book may not have the scholarly rigueur required by an academic trying to increase her understanding of indigenous perspectives on the subject. An academic text may turn off the community librarian wanting advice on how to carry out his daily tasks in a tribal library. As such the editors have included articles that would be of interest to multiple audiences.

*Tribal Libraries, Archives and Museums* is a healthy addition to a growing body of literature on reclaiming and preserving indigenous cultural identity. It is of use and interest to the student or practitioner of library, archive or museum work.