Participatory Archives: Theory and Practice. Edward Benoit, III and Alexandra
Eveleigh, eds. London, England: Facet Publishing, 2019. Paperback, 263p.
$80.99 (ISBN 978-1-78330-356-4).

The archival community continues to expand its reliance on digital tools to yield
dynamic user engagement and increased access to collections. Editors Edward Benoit, III and Alexandra Eveleigh posit that the advancement of web technology during the last two decades increased the scope and impact of participatory archives.
Benoit, currently a professor at the School of Library & Information Science at
Louisiana State University, is the founder of the Virtual Footlocker Project, focusing on digital tools for soldiers to document their military experience. Eveleigh,
Collections Information Manager at the Wellcome Collection, focuses her research
on digital humanities and the impact of user participation.

In their introduction, the editors briefly describe analog participatory archives such
as mobilizing groups of transcribers or indexers, and the transformation to virtual
access by reference to the Polar Bear Expedition Finding Aid.[2] Web-based intellectual and physical access modifies public services functionalities by "facilitating asynchronous interactions between archivists and users" (1). The editors discuss a range
of participatory archives projects, including engagement with digital surrogates,
crowd-sourced transcription or metadata creation for digital content, and developing relationships with communities in collaborative collection development. These
activities are unified under the concept of participatory heritage, which is both
applicable to traditional definitions as being of the past, but also to contemporary
movements associated with a community. The terms *participatory archives* and *community archives* are used interchangeably throughout the book.

The book's structure is a compilation of 18 essays grouped around four concepts:
social tagging and commenting; transcription; crowdfunding and research; and
alternative, activist communities. The first two concepts represent engagement
with the records, the third represents engagement with stakeholders, while the
last represents engagement with the creators of the records. Each section is presented as a capsule with a literature review, theoretical analysis, and case studies.
This capsule structure offers the reader the ability to consult the book to learn
about a specific type of user engagement. Case studies of interest include: community engagement for photograph identification between Library and Archives
Canada and indigenous communities (chapter 4); crowdsourcing description to
increase discoverability of audiovisual materials at the American Archive of Public Broadcasting (chapter 8); and contemporary acquisition of materials related
to the 2015 Baltimore protests (chapter 16). The book's 24 scholarly contribu-

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2. For digital materials relating to the Polar Bear Expedition, see https://bentley.umich.edu/research/catalogs-databases/polar-bear/.

tors offer international perspectives (primarily North American and European) and represent a mix of professions such as museums, archives, consultancy, and academic libraries.

Benoit and Eveleigh compiled a practical and balanced guide for archival and heritage professionals to understand the development, application, and challenges of participatory archives. A similar-themed book, *Participatory Heritage* by Henriette Roued-Cunliffe and Andrea Copeland (Facet, 2017[3]), employs the same approach of case studies about collecting material, but the structure of Benoit and Eveleigh's book offers a comprehensive exploration of the theories and value of community engagement. The last section of their book focuses on a growing commitment in the archival community to real-time documentation of various sociocultural movements. However, with only two case studies in this section, it is difficult to extrapolate the infrastructure implications for maintaining and providing continual access to those records. Indeed, in their concluding chapter, Benoit and Eveleigh ask "can participatory archives move beyond a bounded project-by-project approach and begin to embed their collaborative methodologies into the mainstream functions of archival practice?" (215–16). Neither case study in this section discussed technical integration within a larger collection management system. Indeed, the Baltimore Uprising Archive's website was publicly unavailable when writing this review.[4]

As a public services librarian, I am continually seeking methods to increase access to the collections at my repository. I fully embrace the idea that engagement and knowledge creation should not be bounded by the confines (physical, geographical, or temporal) of a reading room. There are overlapping spheres of engagement and knowledge creation within the concept of participatory archives (for example, the engaged user acquiring knowledge while transcribing or adding metadata, and the future user who benefits from increased discoverability of records). However, based on the editors' supposition that digital technology propels the proliferation of participatory archives, I wonder about the future of engagement. How will machine learning impact user engagement in participatory archives? Yet, even in a future dominated by machine-sourced metadata, there will remain a vibrant space for engagement with communities. Therefore, the future of engagement must prompt archival professionals to revise collection development policies to include systematic discussions with record creators of how to collaboratively provide robust access.—*Lauren Goss, University of Oregon*

3. See www.facetpublishing.co.uk/title.php?id=301232#.XnPNnHJ7k2w for information about this title.
4. At the time of publication, the site is available here: https://baltimoreuprising2015.org/.