BOOK REVIEW
By Linda Whitaker, Arizona Historical Foundation

When was the last time you read or better yet, purchased a book that represented the broadest spectrum of issues and trends in political papers?

When was the last time you found a text that included the best of the classic professional literature pertaining to your specialty and the latest thinking on data mining case files and managing artifacts?

When was the last time you discovered a book directly speaking to you as congressional papers archivists and to the users of your collections?

Answer: Never until now.

What Karen Paul, Glenn Gray and Rebecca Melvin Johnson have achieved is nothing short of a **milestone in archival literature** by focusing on the acquisition, documentation, appraisal, arrangement, description, evolution of research centers, and user perspectives of political papers. It was Glenn's idea to compile an anthology that could serve as reference for those professionals working in the field managing and building congressional collections. Getting there wasn't easy.

Relevant articles were scattered among various journals, books were out-of-print, new scholarship had developed, and new authors had to be found. It was also an opportunity to include, under one cover, thoughtful commentary from users of political collections. The result: 30 contributors representing a broad spectrum of institutions and 29 articles organized by topic. The articles include endnotes which often reveal "behind the scenes" details, historical context, and personal observations. The citations are often inter-disciplinary and connect the reader to a wider political archives world.

The material feels fresh, thoughtful, reliable, tested, and grounded both in theory and practice. Patricia Aronsson's piece is as relevant today as it was 25 years ago. In my view, she was the first to declare what congressional papers were and were not. Her clear thinking and questioning of practice paved the way for later critical analysis by Mark Greene and others. And for those who have any doubt, the push for efficiency and cost effectiveness started with congressional papers!

For this reviewer, there are three "classics" that no practicing archivist should be without:
- *The American Archivist*, vol. 41, Number 3, July 1978 -a watershed issue featuring congressional collections and frank commentary by Lydia Lucas, Eleanor McKay, and Richard A. Baker. They are the pioneers.
- *Managing Congressional Collections* by Cynthia Pease Miller 2008 – a 30 -year journey and a lifeline for those in the trenches and for those making policy from above.
- *An American Political Archives Reader* edited by Karen Dawley Paul, Glenn R. Gray, and L. Rebecca Johnson Melvin – a scholarly, practical, fundamental work that should be included in any library/archives graduate program. This is a model for how a specialty archives anthology should look, feel and function.

Bottom line: I've already cited *An American Political Archives Reader* for another project!