the world. *Dark Archives* is unique, provocative, and powerful, prompting readers to not only grapple with modern medicine's history, but also their own views about death and the ethics of medical research. While the study of anthropodermic bibliopegy is new and attracts an interest from a wider demographic of readers, Rosenbloom's strong scholarship methods presented in *Dark Archives* is on par with other more established related subject areas in academia. Researchers looking to examine a strong, engaging, and honest exploration of a new complex topic often set against the backdrops of heavily studied periods of Western history will take much away from this work.

Cortada, James W. *Building Blocks of Society: History, Information Ecosystems, and Infrastructures.* Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2021. ISBN: 9781538148549. Hardcover: $95.00.

Reviewed by Evan Kuehn, North Park University

James Cortada, senior research fellow at the Charles Babbage Institute for Computing, Information and Culture, has for years made important contributions to the history of computing, information, and business. His work on IBM connects many of these fields (also discussed in chapter 6 of the present book). More recently, Cortada has been busy establishing methodological standards for the emerging field of information history, and this volume introduces the field with a collection of methodological and case study essays. Most of the contents are revised from previous journal articles, especially from *Information and Culture*, but here they come together as something like a unified proposal with attending showcases of some individual research specimens.

Information history is a growing field of study, with the above-mentioned *Information and Culture* recognized as a flagship journal. From popular books such as James Gleick's *The Information: A History, a Theory, a Flood*, to studies and edited volumes from scholars such as Toni Weller and Alistair Black, the field is diverse and interdisciplinary but beginning to take shape around the processes and practices of information's creation, use, and effects. Cortada's book works largely from its own resources rather than through extensive methodological engagement with these earlier treatments (a weakness of the volume), but does contribute in areas where the author has a long and recognized track record: computer and corporate history.

The book can be read according to personal interest in the case studies discussed, but the first chapter on "Information History as a Research Topic" helpfully sets the stage with some guiding assumptions. Cortada identifies four key concepts in information history: *information frameworks*, which are the organizational approaches to information about a subject; *information ecosystems*, the network of persons that constitute a field of information (similar to but usually much broader than an academic discipline); *information infrastructures*, the network of nonhuman objects constituting an information field; and *information flows*, the movement of information within the field. Most of these terms have a history in information theory, library science, and elsewhere, but Cortada helpfully brings them together as components of a unified historical approach to information in society.

Chapters 2–8 can be read individually as case studies, though chapters 2–3 are unique among the group in how they offer full case histories, of firms and industries and of computer history as a field of study. Both offer helpful considerations for the pioneering work of those who engage information society with new questions, such as "What data (facts) were needed to support the work of people, processes, and organizations?" and "What information was tracked and how did that data affect subsequent actions?" (48–49). In addition, Cortada discusses computer history as an institutional story of subfield development within a context of fewer available information resources than are present in more established modes of historical inquiry (68).

The remaining case studies look at particular ecosystems of information flow: the Spanish diplomatic corps from the Congress of Vienna to the Spanish Civil War, late twentieth-century homemakers in rural Virginia, IBM sales divisions, the computer sciences before 1975, and family genealogists. These selections provide a spectrum of applications from professional to amateur, local to international, and official to informal ecosystems. Patterns thereby emerge for the field of information history generally. For instance, the differences between homemaker recipe exchange and global diplomatic correspondence are immense, but both deal with gaps in information access in creative ways that can be traced and mapped. The developments in computing technology that were meticulously managed at IBM to introduce a client audience to new product lines were also incorporated into the workflows of genealogists, as research on family histories evolved from idiosyncratic paper filing and long trips to distant archives, to an ecosystem where email and scanning technologies made these tasks more immediate and replicable.

The book closes with reflections on information history as a discipline and asks an important question: "Do we run the risk of being too broad, too shallow, or not deep enough in our analysis of information?" (299). Another way of putting this concern is that the reflexive nature of information history—it is at heart an attempt to organize information about the organization of information—perhaps leads inevitably to an inadequate representation of its object. Regardless of what information history risks in its approach to communication and society, though, there are clearly gains to be made, which Cortada illustrates well in the analogy he draws to the concept of the supply chain (301). Prior to the 1980s (for information, we might say prior to the dawn of the "information age" in the 1950s), supply chains (alternatively, information ecosystems) were certainly already present and functional. With the explicit conceptualization of them and concerted critical attention to them, however, a cascade of optimizing and revolutionizing efforts took place that had an indelible effect on the field itself, that is, as a field of human activity. What is lost in this process is worth considering: the intuitive or serendipitous approaches to supply chains, or for some of the book's case studies, the inefficiencies of diplomatic intrigue and intergenerational lore, perhaps. But what is gained is a better understanding of how our social life is formed by such processes, and they can potentially be improved by scholarly analysis.

Throughout the book Cortada's title, *Building Blocks of Society*, remains more inconspicuous than its subtitle, *History, Information Ecosystems, and Infrastructure*, but by the end the reader can see its significance. Information history often engages with recent developments in technology and business, but always does so in order to understand the continuities with more foundational social formations. Although the histories covered in this volume do not extensively address the library itself as an information institution, Cortada does connect library history with information history, for instance in his discussion of the rise of computer history as a field of study, and the shift in resources for historical research to include company libraries attached to corporations such as IBM and AT&T (68–71). Historians of libraries and historicizers of information science more broadly will benefit from the bridges that Cortada builds between libraries as venerated and professional information ecosystems, to the diverse and evolving information ecosystems that define modern social systems.