

# Thirty Years On: SAA and Descriptive Standards

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## Abstract

The speakers consider SAA's role in creating and maintaining descriptive standards for U.S. archivists during the past thirty years. Among their topics: the development of descriptive standards in the United States, with a particular focus on SAA's past and potential roles; early efforts to adapt bibliographic standards for use with archival materials; the emergence of a truly archival international framework for description and the U.S. response; and the promising future of archival metadata standards that better support discovery, sharing, and reuse of descriptive information by users and archivists in responsive, network-accessible tools.

## Introduction

*Steven L. Hensen*

Welcome to session 706, "Thirty Years On: SAA and Descriptive Standards." My name is Steve Hensen. I retired in January 2010 after twenty-four years at Duke University in what will soon be known as the Rubenstein Special Collections Library and after more than forty years as an archivist. As we all certainly know by now, 2011 celebrates the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Society of American Archivists (SAA). It is also the thirtieth anniversary of the

Session 706 at the 75th Annual Meeting of the Society of American Archivists, Chicago, Illinois, Saturday, 27 August 2011. Steven L. Hensen chaired this session. Kathleen D. Roe could not attend the conference, so Victoria Irons Walch introduced and read her paper. Michael Rush had to leave the annual meeting early, so William E. Landis read his paper. William Stocking served as commentator for the session.

official approval by SAA of the MARC AMC format,<sup>1</sup> which marks the beginnings of the uneasy relationship between the Society and the development, promulgation, and maintenance of standards. In this case, we are talking specifically about descriptive standards, which have been so critical (at least to my mind) to some of the most important advances of the profession. These standards provide us the means to communicate information about our repositories and our holdings in a structured and unambiguous way. And, while the issues surrounding these standards may have seemed relatively straightforward and easy to wrap our heads around, they do raise broader questions regarding the role of this professional society in stimulating and managing a much larger universe of standards, which are increasingly essential to our professional identity and responsibilities.

By way of helping us understand this larger picture, the panelists today will explore these issues in the context of the development of descriptive standards. Now that I have retired, the past thirty years (closer to forty in my case) recede in a swirling fog of acronyms: *APPM*, *AACR*, *NISTF*, *MARC AMC*, *WGSAD*, *RLG*, *RLIN*, *ISAD(G)*, *RAD*, *MAD*, *SGML/XML*, *FINDAID*, *EAD*, *EAC*, *NC-ECHO*, *CUSTARD*, *DACS*, and it goes on. By my reckoning, I have spoken, written, or otherwise held forth on most of these subjects over two hundred times in the forty-plus years of my membership in SAA. Given the “Then, Now, and WOW!” theme of this conference, it seems pretty clear that I am neither “Now” nor “Wow.” It is time for others to speak (or at least for me to shut up), and all of our speakers are not only uniquely qualified to do so, but have been deeply involved in the ongoing work of these standards.

There will be a slight change in the program today. At the time this session was developed, Kathleen Roe had no idea where her most wonderful and beautiful daughter, Kate, would be attending college; as it turns out she will be attending the University of Buffalo and she is moving in today—even as we speak. Consequently, Vicki Walch has generously consented to play the role of Kathleen Roe, a part that I’m sure even Kathleen occasionally finds challenging. I am confident that Vicki can carry this off seamlessly—just squint a little and you may not know the difference.

<sup>1</sup> The Machine Readable Cataloging (MARC) format for Archival and Manuscripts Control (AMC) no longer exists as a separate format following MARC format integration; see footnote 13 for additional information.

## **Out of the Primordial Ooze: The Genesis of U.S. Archival Descriptive Standards**

*Kathleen D. Roe (presented by Victoria Irons Walch)*

*In the Beginning. . .*

For those entering the archival profession in the 1970s, there were no archival descriptive standards, no commonly agreed-upon data elements, formats, or controlled vocabularies. Things that seem *a priori* now—like Encoded Archival Description (EAD), *Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DAC5)*, or the SAA Standards Committee<sup>2</sup>—were unthinkable, or at least unspeakable. Yet, after literally decades of denial about the need for them, the period from 1977 to 1990 brought descriptive standards out of the primordial ooze and thrust archives and archivists forward in a much-needed way in a critical area of practice, as well as in our ability to work collaboratively and function as a profession.

This emergence was not the result of the leadership of one iconic figure or organization, but the product of fertile and sometimes fantastical ideas that begat collaborative and overlapping, successive, sometimes parallel efforts. These came from a variety of sources: the Society of American Archivists, federal funding agencies like the National Historical Publications and Records Commission and the National Endowment for the Humanities, federal institutions including the National Archives and the Library of Congress, and bibliographic services organizations like the Research Libraries Group. Most important, though, and the real soul of all those efforts, were the energetic individuals and their supportive employing institutions who conceived of enormous ideas for engaging with descriptive issues, then got people together to make the thoughts come to fruition.

### **The State of Ooze**

Before considering the role of SAA and these other forces in descriptive standard development, some stage-setting may be in order for those who were not involved in the archival profession, or were not either conscious or maybe even alive in the 1970s. This is not an exhaustive history of the development or lack thereof of descriptive practice, which is covered elsewhere in the literature. Those interested in a more thorough history should seek out articles by

<sup>2</sup> For more information on Encoded Archival Description, see the Library of Congress Encoded Archival Description Version 2002 Official Site, <http://www.loc.gov/ead/>, accessed 5 November 2011. *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2007). For more information on the SAA Standards Committee, see Society of American Archivists "Standards Committee Website," <http://www.archivists.org/saagroups/standards/>, accessed 5 November 2011.

Susan E. Davis<sup>3</sup> and Steven L. Hensen,<sup>4</sup> and the timeline of descriptive developments compiled by Victoria Walch and others<sup>5</sup>.

As early as 1912, the American Historical Association called for the preparation of a manual of what it then termed “archival economy.” In spite of the publication, over the ensuing years, of manuals of practice by people like Lucile Kane, Ruth Bordin, and Robert Warner, and the translation into English of the Dutch manual by Muller, Feith, and Fruin, archival description in the United States remained eclectic and institution-specific because archivists could maintain the myth that each institution was unique and needed its own approach to description and finding aids.<sup>6</sup> The incentive of derivative or copy cataloging was not there for archivists as it was for librarians.<sup>7</sup> Even the initial lures of automated access provided by SPINDEX,<sup>8</sup> a system initially developed by the National Archives and later managed by the Library of Congress, did not seem sufficient to change the belief in individualized practice. In fact, the institutions that implemented SPINDEX took the software and adapted it to their individual practices to the extent that each installation became unique and nontransferable.

As the 1970s went on, however, “automation,” as it was then called, provided the hot air to make the ooze begin to bubble, or as Susan Davis more elegantly phrases it, archives began to experience a “convergence,” so that technology, the growth of the profession, increasing education, and the demand for access made conditions right for the emergence of descriptive standards, however slow or painful.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Susan E. Davis, “Descriptive Standards and the Archival Profession,” *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly* 35, nos. 3–4 (2003): 291–308.

<sup>4</sup> Steven L. Hensen, “The First Shall Be First: APPM and Its Impact on American Archival Description,” *Archivaria* 35 (Spring 1993): 64–70.

<sup>5</sup> “Report of the Working Group on Standards for Archival Description,” *American Archivist* 52, no. 4 (Fall 1989): 441–450, HathiTrust Digital Library, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015061537562>, accessed 29 January 2012.

<sup>6</sup> See American Historical Association, *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1912* (Washington, D.C.: American Historical Association, 1914), 254. Examples of these manuals of practice include work by the Illinois State Library under the direction of Margaret Cross Norton; guidelines on the preparation of preliminary finding aids by the U.S. National Archives and Records Service; S. Muller, J. A. Feith, and R. Fruin, *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives* (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1940); Ruth Bordin and Robert Warner, *The Modern Manuscript Library* (New York: Scarecrow Press, 1966); and Lucile Kane, *A Guide to the Care and Administration of Manuscripts* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1966).

<sup>7</sup> Lisa B. Weber, “Educating Archivists for Automation,” *Library Trends* 36 (Winter 1988), 501–509.

<sup>8</sup> Regarding SPINDEX (Selective Permutation Indexing), see the entry in Richard Pearce-Moses, *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2005), Society of American Archivists, [http://www.archivists.org/glossary/term\\_details.asp?DefinitionKey=1754](http://www.archivists.org/glossary/term_details.asp?DefinitionKey=1754), accessed 5 November 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Davis, “Descriptive Standards and the Archival Profession,” 292.

### **The Emergence**

In some countries, where colleagues were also wrestling with the need to develop or codify descriptive practice, the national archives took leadership roles in forging this path, rather like the old football strategy of the flying wedge, in which a strong leader and structure linked together and pushed things forward. In the United States, perhaps because of our history as a democracy,<sup>10</sup> it was rather more like the mud-pit volleyball that is a popular activity at some universities these days. The players rotate through different roles, sometimes leading, sometimes spiking, sometimes changing out for a rest, and sometimes falling flat in the mud. The game is a bit wild and raucous, and certainly a hands-on experience, but one that has moments of brilliance and glory as well as being good fun. In spite of its sometimes chaotic character, the move toward standardization in the United States ultimately led to a “win” for the archival profession. So who were the players, and what roles did they take?

Since this paper is being delivered as part of the Society of American Archivists 75<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting, it is getting first attention in this list of players. Though some members pushed it hard and hoped it would take a strong leadership role, SAA did not always maintain a consistent level of involvement and commitment during this period. It did serve as a prime mover initially with the National Information Systems Task Force (NISTF), funded by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) in 1977, to grapple with the emerging issues of how to create a national information system for archives and manuscripts collections.<sup>11</sup> NISTF’s heady work led first to the development of a data elements dictionary by Elaine Engst, which proved definitively that archivists all indeed collected the same information, although they might call the elements by different names.<sup>12</sup> Following on that work, NISTF successfully developed the Library of Congress’s MARC (MACHINE-Readable Cataloging) data structure to include a format for Archives and Manuscripts Control (MARC

<sup>10</sup> Additionally, the different traditions through which the archival profession developed in the United States may have had a profound impact on the particular development of descriptive practice. For more on these traditions, see Luke Gilliland-Swetland, “The Provenance of a Profession: The Permanence of the Public Archives and Historical Manuscripts Traditions in American Archival History,” *American Archivist* 54 (Spring 1991): 160–75, HathiTrust Digital Library, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015072452835>, accessed 14 December 2011.

<sup>11</sup> David Bearman, *Towards National Information Systems for Archives and Manuscript Repositories: The National Information Systems Task Force (NISTF) Papers, 1981–1984* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1987), Hathi Trust Digital Library, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015032829502>, accessed 5 November 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Elaine D. Engst, *Standard Elements for the Description of Archives and Manuscripts: A Report to the SAA Task Force on National Information Systems* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Libraries, 1980).

AMC).<sup>13</sup> There is not time here to go into why the route chosen was expanding a library bibliographic data structure, which some with the gift of hindsight might think a bit daft, but suffice it to say that it was the best, and frankly the only, way at that time to get archives into the automation game and to move us forward in confronting the need for descriptive standards.

SAA did not sustain the leadership role that NISTF's work initially suggested. In fact, a decade later when the SAA Description Section recommended to SAA Council to seek funding to address the issue of the by-then active development and use of a range of standards for archival description, SAA felt it could not take on this work. Others ultimately assumed that responsibility, which will be addressed later. As a professional association, SAA either was not able or chose not to place itself in a regular leadership role for research and innovation in tackling problems of descriptive practice.

SAA did, however, take a more consistent role in educating archivists, disseminating information, and later in providing the wherewithal to maintain standards once they were developed. With National Endowment for the Humanities funding, SAA obtained two consecutive grants for its Automated Archival Information Program,<sup>14</sup> staffed for nearly the entire time by Lisa B. Weber, who ensured a strong educational program and participated in many of the descriptive development efforts. SAA's workshops to provide instruction in use of the MARC AMC format were wildly popular and, while teaching attendees about the MARC data structure, also highlighted the need for standardized descriptive data content practices. With a raucous array of articles in its journal, the publication in its Archival Fundamentals Series of *Arranging and Describing Archives and Manuscripts*,<sup>15</sup> and many other publications, SAA spread the word about the emergence of descriptive standards.

SAA also took on the role of maintaining standards, supporting representatives to such groups as the American Library Association's Machine-Readable Bibliographic Information Committee (MARBI) and the Bureau of Canadian Archivists's Descriptive Standards Committee. SAA also created the Committee on Archival Information Exchange to review and maintain the *Data Elements Dictionary* and the MARC AMC format. Those review and maintenance functions eventually led to expanded roles for SAA when EAD emerged and ultimately to the creation of the SAA Standards Committee.

<sup>13</sup> For additional information about the data elements dictionary and the development of the MARC AMC format, see Victoria Irons Walch, comp., *Standards for Archival Description: A Handbook* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1994), especially chapter 1, Society of American Archivists, <http://www.archivists.org/catalog/stds99/index.html>, accessed 5 November 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Weber, "Educating Archivists for Automation," 501–18.

<sup>15</sup> Fredric M. Miller, *Arranging and Describing Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1990), Hathi Trust Digital Library, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015025155477>, accessed 5 November 2011.

The tension felt by SAA's leadership, and by the members who demanded much of the organization, was in part due to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) not taking a role in descriptive standards development. NARA, to be frank, was neither prepared nor willing to get down in the mud with the rest of the U.S. archival profession. Unlike the national archival institutions in a number of European countries, as well as Canada and Australia, the U.S. National Archives did not see itself as the leader of archival institutions in the United States, since it is not mandated to do so by law. It saw its role instead as addressing its own particular institutional descriptive needs, predominantly with large, complex federal government records. It made no effort to take a leadership role, to develop practices that addressed needs beyond its own requirements, or to disseminate information on its work and serve as a model of best practice for the field. So, while National Archives staff members like the late Ted Weir sometimes participated in discussions and projects, the institution did not play the formative role that other national archives did.

The Library of Congress (LOC), with its predominant emphasis on books and published materials, did take on some important roles in regard to archival descriptive practice. As part of its work with *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules*<sup>16</sup> (AACR), it published *Archives, Personal Papers and Manuscripts*<sup>17</sup> (APPM), that little blue book by Steven Hensen that provided the first real set of descriptive content rules that archivists could actually use with archival materials. Along with the MARC AMC format, it became the linchpin of emerging standardization for archival descriptive practice. LOC also maintained the MARC AMC format as part of the suite of MARC formats and allowed an SAA representative to attend (but not vote at) MARBI meetings, though those involved in the MARC maintenance infrastructure were not always delighted with archivists' muddy hands at their rather austere and formal table. Subsequently, LOC has also become the "home" where EAD is maintained, a far more costly and labor-intensive function than one might imagine. So LOC has served as a good rules manager for our team efforts.

The Research Libraries Group (RLG), which some only know as the component of OCLC it is now, really thrust the archival community forward into the actual implementation of MARC AMC and the standardized descriptive practice that its use really demanded. When the MARC AMC format was introduced, RLG saw it as an important opportunity to add archives and manuscripts materials to its online catalog, the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN), which serves the academic community and many universities with significant

<sup>16</sup> *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules* (Chicago: ALA, 1978).

<sup>17</sup> Steven L. Hensen, *Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts: A Cataloging Manual for Archival Repositories, Historical Societies, and Manuscript Libraries* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1983) and (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1989), HathiTrust Digital Library, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015015402921> (1983 edition) and <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015020866227> (1989 edition), accessed 29 January 2012.

holdings of manuscripts and special collections.<sup>18</sup> While viewed by some as a vendor, RLG, particularly through the persona of the brilliant Alan Tucker, forged many collaborative projects that not only propelled many repositories into the practical world of implementing descriptive standards, but, particularly with state archives, also served as the testing ground for expanding and adapting the descriptive content standards defined in *APPM* to government records.<sup>19</sup> RLG was a catalyst in bringing grant resources to the table that many archives would have had trouble accessing otherwise, as well as serving as a coach to many archivists coming of age in learning to apply standards.

Another important player on the team, or maybe the reason the mud stayed thick and goey, was the NHPRC, which provided support and funding for many projects. In fact, NHPRC, which is the granting arm of the National Archives, really reached out to the archival community and encouraged, sometimes very strongly, work in the development of archival descriptive standards. The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) was also generous in providing funding. Finally, a resource we sometimes forget is the University of Michigan's Bentley Historical Library Fellowship Program, which funded individuals or small teams to come to Ann Arbor for one or two months of supported time to really delve into an archival research need, several of which related to archival description issues.<sup>20</sup>

The prime movers, or perhaps instigators, agitators, workhorses and cheerleaders, for archival descriptive standards in this period, however, were individual archivists and colleagues. They saw the need, believed in the cause, and in ways both amazing and inspiring, conceived of projects and actions needed to move the development of descriptive standards and practice forward. In some cases, they also motivated their institutions or other organizations to sponsor or take on this important work. It would be unwise to try to reel out the names of all the organizations who participated on this patched-together team, but it includes private institutions like Yale, Stanford, Cornell, and Harvard, and public institutions comprising a range of state archives and state historical societies, from Alabama to Minnesota and Wisconsin, and on to New York and California. It is even more dangerous to try to catalog the individuals involved, ranging from the likes of David Bearman, Steve Hensen, Tom Hickerson, Elaine Engst,

<sup>18</sup> For additional information on RLG and RLIN, see *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Research Libraries Group," [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Research\\_Libraries\\_Group](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Research_Libraries_Group), accessed 5 November 2011.

<sup>19</sup> RLG sponsored two grant-funded initiatives, the Seven States Project and the Government Records Project, which collectively involved fifteen state and local governments in developing common practice for describing government records. For more information on these projects, see Kathleen D. Roe, "From Archival Gothic to MARC Modern: Building Common Data Structures," *American Archivist* 53 (Winter 1990): 60, HathiTrust Digital Library, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015061930718>, accessed 29 January 2012.

<sup>20</sup> For more information on this program, funded by the NEH and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and its contributions to the profession, see *A Decade of Sponsored Research* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, 1994).



Lisa Weber, Max Evans, Larry Dowler, Nancy Sahli, Richard Szary, and many more. It is worth mentioning that along the way someone discovered that an overwhelming percentage of those individuals were all born in the same year, 1950, with a few falling on either side of that particular date.

Many projects in the decade and a half from 1977–1990 contributed to developing descriptive standards—this paper is not able to give full tribute to all of them<sup>21</sup>—covering areas from general principles, to specific types of material, to authority control, to an archival information infrastructure. One project though, deserves particular mention because it epitomizes the democratic nature of how archival descriptive practice developed in the United States and how astonishingly productive and synthetic those developments were. As noted earlier in the discussion of SAA, by 1987 there had been such substantial development of standards, guidelines, and adoption of practices as to create a growing state of confusion. When Council rejected the recommendation of the Description Section to pursue funding to rationalize, assess, and make recommendations for future work and development, the idea did not die. Some responded with anger and dissatisfaction to SAA’s decision; however, the intrepid Lawrence Dowler of Harvard University, a long-time advocate of standards, a great thinker, and a man who cannot be told no, went to his managers and proposed that Harvard serve as the umbrella for this project. They agreed, and the Working Group on Standards for Archival Description (WGSAD) came into existence, an effort with no formal professional affiliation to an organization or institution and with a cast of characters possessed of boundless energy, strong opinions, and an almost unlimited capacity for hard work. WGSAD really brought together the advancements and remaining issues that had emerged since 1977, codified practice, and developed a strong action agenda and recommendations for the profession.<sup>22</sup> It laid out clearly the progress and the remaining needs and issues in the areas of archival participation in the standards-setting process, the leadership responsibilities of national institutions, the need for endorsement of specific standards for archival description, education and training needs, and, finally, research and development needs. While all of its recommendations have not been realized, many important steps have been taken to create a firm foundation for the ongoing development of archival descriptive practice in this profession. WGSAD’s work also demonstrates the distance archivists had come in truly professionalizing descriptive practices.

Because of the level of development reflected by WGSAD, it is accurate to say that by the end of the 1980s, U.S. archivists had indeed made it out of the

<sup>21</sup> See the previously cited sidebar timeline in “Report of the Working Group on Standards for Archival Description,”: 441–450.

<sup>22</sup> Working Group on Standards for Archival Description, “Archival Description Standards: Establishing a Process for Their Development and Implementation,” *American Archivist* 52 (Fall 1989): 430–502, HathiTrust Digital Library, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015071393824>, accessed 29 January 2012.

primordial ooze. Many further steps have been taken in descriptive standards, all welcome and needed, but they rest on a foundation that created an understanding and acceptance of the need for standards and methods for creating, maintaining, and educating archivists about them.

It is worth considering whether it is appropriate to have expected the U.S. National Archives to take a leadership, or at least a stronger role in the development of descriptive standards as national archives have in other countries. Some think the answer is yes, that national institutions of such scope have financial and infrastructure resources that should be brought to bear for the benefit of the entire national community. Archival institutions might not have had to rely so heavily on grants and on vendors like RLG to push things forward had the U.S. National Archives taken a more active role. Perhaps U.S. archivists would not have had to rely on the library community and to create an archival access system within the confines of a library-centric bibliographic approach. Working within the MARC AMC framework and library-style systems required compromises and acrobatics that were difficult and sometimes led us a bit far afield from our goals. For at least the past four decades, the National Archives has not seen its role as being the flagship of the U.S. archival community, but some archival colleagues still believe it should be and should have been.

Should SAA, in the absence of national institutional leadership, have stepped up and taken the lead beyond what it did? At the time, many thought SAA should have, since it was the only organization that in fact did consciously see itself as representing the U.S. archival community. With its ever-changing leadership structure based on a one-year presidency, an executive director with the role of coordinator and not anointed leader, and even with a council elected to three-year terms, asking SAA to make a commitment to research and development and to creating standards is a considerable demand. SAA does well in the information dissemination and education role, and in maintaining standards, but taking that leadership role was more than it could accomplish at the time.

Without leadership by national organizations or institutions in descriptive standards development, progress relied on individual commitment. It depended especially on the willingness of institutions to support the involvement of staff members in efforts that transcended their direct institutional responsibilities in favor of a greater good that would eventually, but not immediately, benefit the institution. The times, the people, and the institutions made it possible to devote many hours to group work, fly around the country for project meetings, argue, write, test, and massage descriptive approaches into common standards. Much of that time came from professional development time allotted by an individual's employer or from uncompensated personal time. Do all professions rely so heavily on this kind of commitment to develop their professional practice standards? They do not. Really, they do not! We have been fortunate that our

community has been willing to do this work under such conditions. That approach, though, may make standards work challenging in the future, and it means that, while archivists are out of the ooze, the game is not on dry land yet.

All dire thoughts of mud aside, archivists now have descriptive standards and standards-setting processes. We have had them long enough that, for some, it can be hard to imagine anything else, and many take them as one of the assumed principles of our professional life. This paper is intended as a reminder that it was very, very different not that long ago, and the initial development of descriptive standards was only accomplished with considerable dedication and effort.

The activities and developments in descriptive practice during this period, to return to a very muddy metaphor, were ultimately a team effort, however messy, that was driven by a cohort of committed individuals who charmed, coerced, cajoled, cursed, and collaborated to bring descriptive practice out of the mud and ooze. Their efforts helped archivists and archival institutions achieve a reputable and respectable status as a profession that has much to contribute to ensuring the availability of the American historical record to its people.

## **Overcoming the Bibliographic Conundrum in Archival Description**

*William E. Landis*

**I**n 2000, in a traveling Charles and Ray Eames exhibit that I saw in Los Angeles, I was captivated by a display of the vivid still-image production panels from the Eames's film, *Powers of Ten*,<sup>23</sup> arrayed on both sides of a gently curving wall. In a talk later that year at the SAA Annual Meeting in Denver, I used this film as a metaphor for archival description, one that I think is at least as relevant today as it was eleven years ago.<sup>24</sup>

The series of still images shifts by powers of ten from a man sleeping on a blanket on the grass, with what looks to be the remains of a picnic, outward to ten to the power of twenty-six ( $10^{26}$ ) and inward to ten to the power of negative eighteen ( $10^{-18}$ ). I argued in 2000 that the Eames's *Powers of Ten* is a visually powerful lesson about the importance of the contextual relationships

<sup>23</sup> For additional information on the film, including the opportunity to see the film itself and to view the production stills, see *Powers of Ten*, <http://www.powersof10.com/>, accessed 2 August 2011. The Library of Congress maintains an online version of the traveling exhibit at *The Work of Charles and Ray Eames*, <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/eames/>, accessed 8 August 2011.

<sup>24</sup> That talk, "Let There Be [Archival Information]: Presenting Standardized Data to End Users," was part of Session 49, More Bang for Your Buck: Evolving Standards in Archival Description, at the 2000 SAA Annual Meeting in Denver. Kris Kiesling was the session chair, and my fellow speakers were Michael Fox and Richard Szary.

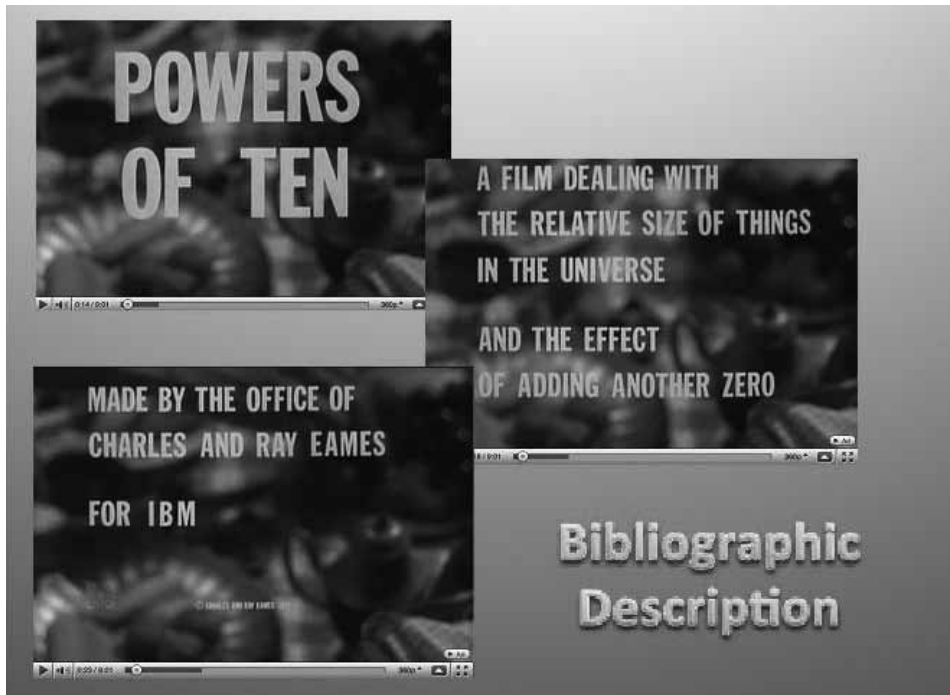


FIGURE 1. Opening titles from the film *Powers of Ten* by Charles and Ray Eames. Screen shots captured from the Eames Office *Powers of Ten* website, <http://www.powersof10.com/>, accessed 8 August 2011.

surrounding a chunk of information. In the case of the stills from the film, that information is pictorial, but the metaphor is equally applicable to information rendered in text, sound, and other formats, including digital. It illustrates that sense-making about a unit of information can occur at an indeterminate number of levels of granularity and, very importantly, at levels larger and smaller than the information unit as originally encountered. The experience and inquisitiveness of the viewer bring as much to this sense-making activity as the minimal information provided in the exhibit of stills, which is a totally different experience from viewing the actual film complete with motion and narration.

More to the point of my talk today, *Powers of Ten* serves as a reminder of the stark differences between bibliographic and archival approaches to managing and providing access to information resources. Bibliographic control assumes conscious production of the resource and seeks to transcribe details about that production from the resource itself to aid users in identifying and finding it (see Figure 1). I want to be clear that I am using the term *bibliographic* in its broadest sense to include all types of published and distributed resources. Archival *control*, a more apt term than *description* as the creators of the Machine Readable Cataloging format for Archival and Manuscripts Control (MARCAMC) realized, focuses on resources accumulating organically from the activities of people,



FIGURE 2. Stills from the film *Powers of Ten* by Charles and Ray Eames. Captured from the Eames Office *Powers of Ten* website, <http://www.powersof10.com/>, accessed 8 August 2011.

families, and organizations (see Figure 2). Many of the assumptions underpinning bibliographic data content standards, such as the *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules (AACR2)*<sup>25</sup> and the recently published *Resource Description and Access (RDA)*<sup>26</sup>, have very limited relevance for archival control/description. A host of factors influences the balance archivists strive to achieve between any given organic accumulation of materials and the tools adequate for managing and providing access to it, including resources, condition as received, and the extremely relative appraised significance of the accumulated materials. These factors resonate very differently in controlling and describing these materials archivally than they might, if they resonate at all, in the bibliographic endeavor.

The previous paper explored the background of the development of U.S. archival descriptive standards, beginning in the late 1970s and really coming to fruition during the 1980s. In addition to lack of consensus about elements of archival description, the absence of an international archival description standard, and the status of online library catalogs and networks as the sole means of

<sup>25</sup> For more information on AACR2, see *Wikipedia*, s.v. “AACR2,” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AACR2>, accessed 14 August 2011.

<sup>26</sup> For more information on RDA, see Joint Steering Committee for the Development of RDA, “RDA Resource Description and Access,” <http://www.rda-jsc.org/rda.html>, accessed 14 August 2011.

providing computerized searching and access to information about archival collections, it is also important to remember that at that time, the Internet existed solely as a defense-and-research-focused application not commonly accessible, and that there was no World Wide Web.

What has changed since the work of the National Information Systems Taskforce, the Working Group on Standards for Archival Description, and the emergence of MARC AMC and *APPM*? The most monumental year for the archival profession worldwide was 1994, when the first edition of the *General International Standard Archival Description (ISAD(G))*<sup>27</sup> was published by the International Council on Archives (ICA).<sup>28</sup> In the fall of the previous year, I started the graduate program at the University of Michigan, so I can say from firsthand experience that the publication of *ISAD(G)* made such a small ripple in the archival profession in the United States as to be barely perceptible, which is the crux of the problem I want to explore today.

The primary reason for the minimal impact of *ISAD(G)* in this country in the latter half of the 1990s, I posit, is that we were almost exclusively focused on leveraging the world of bibliographic infrastructures to broadcast information about archival holdings beyond traditional, instantly outdated, printed guides and catalogs.<sup>29</sup> It is important to remember that the mid-1990s in the bibliographic world was the era of MARC format integration, which did away with separately maintained formats for books, visual materials, archivally controlled resources, and the like, and created the omnibus USMARC that we know today.<sup>30</sup> It was critically important for U.S. archivists that the hard-fought gains represented by MARC AMC, on which the paint was figuratively still wet, didn't get lost in the broader format integration effort.

Another reason why *ISAD(G)*'s publication in 1994 did not have much impact in the United States is that, at exactly the same time, the experimental encoding work going on at the Berkeley Finding Aid Project (BFAP)<sup>31</sup> was

<sup>27</sup> *ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Ottawa: International Council on Archives, 2000), [http://www.icacds.org.uk/eng/ISAD\(G\).pdf](http://www.icacds.org.uk/eng/ISAD(G).pdf), accessed 12 August 2011.

<sup>28</sup> International Council on Archives, "Welcome to ICA," <http://www.ica.org/>, accessed 14 August 2011.

<sup>29</sup> These guides were produced both by individual repositories and, at a level more comprehensive and national in scope, by the Library of Congress through its *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections (NUCMC)*. For additional information on *NUCMC*, see *Wikipedia*, s.v. "NUCMC," <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nucmc> and Library of Congress, "National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections," <http://www.loc.gov/coll/nucmc/>, accessed 12 August 2011.

<sup>30</sup> The principal source for information on USMARC is the website maintained by the Library of Congress Network Development and MARC Standards Office, "MARC Standards," <http://www.loc.gov/marc/>, accessed 12 August 2011. A good overview of the issues leading to MARC format integration can be found in Kathryn P. Glennan, "Format Integration: The Final Phase," *MC Journal: The Journal of Academic Media Librarianship* 3 (Fall 1995): 1–31, <http://wings.buffalo.edu/publications/mcjrnl/v3n2/glennan.html>, accessed 14 August 2011.

<sup>31</sup> For additional information on BFAP, see Berkeley Digital Library Sunsite, "Berkeley Finding Aid Project," <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/FindingAids/EAD/bfap.html>, accessed 14 August 2011.

beginning to attract national attention. Its nascent FINDAID DTD<sup>32</sup> would shortly thereafter be transformed into Encoded Archival Description (EAD)<sup>33</sup>, and the excitement and debate it generated in U.S. archival circles served to divert attention and effort from archival data content standards to data structures and the various ways archivists might deliver archival information using the rapidly emerging World Wide Web.

This isn't to say that no one in the United States was thinking about *ISAD(G)*. Anyone who has noticed how straightforward the mapping is between *ISAD(G)* data elements and EAD tags<sup>34</sup> will not be surprised that important work went on early in EAD's evolution to align the emerging data structure to the new international standard. It also should come as no surprise that many of the energetic collaborators involved in the work of NISTF and WGSAD, chronicled in the previous paper, were also engaged in EAD.

It really wasn't until 2004 and the publication of the first edition of *DACS* that content standards used by U.S. archivists caught up with data structures like EAD in terms of their incorporation of *ISAD(G)*. *DACS* emerged from the Canadian-U.S. Taskforce on Archival Description, better known as the CUSTARD Project,<sup>35</sup> which ultimately did not produce the envisioned standard that could be used on both sides of the forty-ninth parallel. It did, nonetheless, produce a robust, easily maintained content standard for use on the southern side of that international border. After nearly a decade of using it and teaching others about it in a variety of settings, I would argue that *DACS* has served the archival profession in the United States quite well.

So what has been the role during the late 1990s and 2000s of the major organizational players noted in the previous paper? Unlike national archives in many other countries, NARA<sup>36</sup> in the United States was not a leader in the development and subsequent use of either EAD or *DACS* and has chosen to strike out on its own and eschew national leadership in structure and content standards for the U.S. archival community. The Library of Congress, fulfilling a similar role as it did for the bibliographic profession in the United States, has leveraged

<sup>32</sup> FINDAID was the Standard Generalized Markup Language (SGML) Document Type Definition (DTD) created and used by BFAP in the earlier stages of its work. For additional information about SGML and DTDs, see W3C Recommendation, "3. On SGML and HTML," <http://www.w3.org/TR/html4/intro/sgmltut.html>, accessed 14 August 2011.

<sup>33</sup> For a more detailed history of the development of EAD, see Daniel V. Pitti, "Encoded Archival Description: The Development of an Encoding Standard for Archival Finding Aids," *American Archivist* 60 (Summer 1997): 268–283, HathiTrust Digital Library <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015066065395>, accessed 29 January 2012.

<sup>34</sup> The easiest way to see this mapping is using the crosswalks in Appendix C of *Describing Archives*. See especially Table C2: *ISAD(G)* to *DACS* (page 216) and Table C5: *DACS* to EAD to MARC (pages 220–221).

<sup>35</sup> For more information, see the entry on the Canadian-United States Task Force on Archival Description in Pearce-Moses, *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology*.

<sup>36</sup> National Archives and Records Administration, <http://www.archives.gov/>, accessed 14 August 2011.

its standards maintenance and promulgation infrastructure in support of EAD and, to a much lesser extent, *DACS*. One could easily argue, though, that the unique, fundamental nature of archival description is lost on many working in the bibliographically blinkered LOC Network Development and MARC Standards Office.<sup>37</sup>

The Society of American Archivists took a somewhat passive role in work on both standards, providing an umbrella organizational home within its constantly evolving standards infrastructure and administrative oversight for some grants. But the fact is that both EAD and *DACS* owe their existence to the same combination of energetic individuals and their supportive employing institutions as MARC AMC and *APPM* did. Had it not been for the fortuitous series of events that situated the grant-writing dynamo chairing this session, Steve Hensen, at an institution where his role at the time was significantly devoted to grants,<sup>38</sup> I doubt that we would be having this seventy-fifth anniversary retrospective today on SAA's role in the development of descriptive standards.

SAA has certainly been at the forefront in supporting the promulgation of both EAD and *DACS* through its publication and continuing education programs. I would argue, though, that it has been somewhat shortsighted in failing to find a way to invest a portion of the returns on those two activities over the years in developing and supporting a robust standards maintenance infrastructure. *DACS*, for example, was among the top three selling SAA publications for several years after its debut in 2004, and it continues today as one of SAA's best sellers. The jury is still out on whether SAA's current standards infrastructure can support the continuity, engagement, and effort needed to maintain these standards. A challenge facing our professional organization as it celebrates its seventy-fifth year is to decide whether or not it can afford to be a serious standards-maintaining agency, and, if so, to invest organizationally in shaping the kinds of standards that it can realistically maintain.

In spite of the fact that we are well beyond the technological imperatives that necessitated turning to bibliographic networks and standards as foundations for developing U.S. archival standards in the late 1980s, I think that our descriptive practice today continues to suffer from what I would term bibliographic unease. I want to close my portion of this session by exploring why, entering the second decade of the twenty-first century, we continue to rely too heavily on *bibliographic* benchmarks and yardsticks as means of shaping and measuring our professional *archival* descriptive practice.

First, looking at overarching professional processes, there is an understandable gap in the bibliographic world between the acquisition of

<sup>37</sup> Library of Congress, "Network Development and MARC Standards Office," <http://www.loc.gov/marc/ndmso.html>, accessed 14 August 2011.

<sup>38</sup> Hensen served during this period in various capacities relating to special project planning and development at Duke University's Rare Book, Manuscripts and Special Collections Library.



commercially available information products and the primarily transcriptional activities associated with cataloging them and making them available for use. That archivists and archival users still frequently employ the term *cataloging* to label archival arrangement and description activities, I think, suggests too close an identification with bibliographic processes that do not reflect our reality. *APPM*, grounded out of necessity in the *International Standard Bibliographic Description (ISBD)*,<sup>39</sup> brought many U.S. archivists up in a world of cataloging. We did all of our work processing collections and creating finding aids in the absence of standards, and then, *finally*, we could use our standard to create a bibliographic catalog record from the finding aid.<sup>40</sup>

That is not the world of *ISAD(G)* and *DACS*. These standards define core archival information that should be collected and passed on to future users. It must be collected at various points throughout the acquisition or transfer process of records, regardless of format, to repositories. Too many archivists still relegate *ISAD(G)* to description when, I would argue, it is foundational to professional archival practice writ large. My sense from talking to students currently in archival graduate programs is that it frequently doesn't get taught that way, much to the detriment of the future of our profession. The important self-critical and reflexive literature of the past ten to fifteen years—coming from a lineage of Terry Cook, Tom Nesmith, Michelle Light, Tom Hyry, Heather MacNeil, Jennifer Meehan, and others<sup>41</sup>—is about more than description. It challenges all of us to think about capturing and recording salient information throughout our collection acquisition and management processes, and to do so because this information is of critical value to future generations who will use archival information resources to understand the societies and activities they document. Our professional practice is impoverished if we fail to grasp this connection and challenge.

Finally, I want to touch on a more organizationally specific issue. In the early 1990s, when I came of age as an archivist, SAA's liaison activities to

<sup>39</sup> International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, *International Standard Bibliographic Description*, <http://www.ifla.org/en/publications/international-standard-bibliographic-description>, accessed 14 August 2011.

<sup>40</sup> *APPM* was a standard for creating archival catalog records whose chief source of information was the finding aid. Archival cataloging under *APPM* assumed that all of the arrangement work and the production of the finding aid had already been completed. Only then could the standard be used to create a MARC record, typically at the collection level for archives and personal papers, for the materials being described.

<sup>41</sup> To just scratch the surface of this literature, see Terry Cook, "Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth: Postmodernism and the Practice of Archives," *Archivaria* 51 (Spring 2001): 14–35; Tom Nesmith, "Reopening Archives: Bringing New Contextualities into Archival Theory and Practice," *Archivaria* 60 (Fall 2005): 259–74; Michelle Light and Tom Hyry, "Colophons and Annotations: New Directions for the Finding Aid," *American Archivist* 65 (Fall/Winter 2002): 216–30; Heather MacNeil, "Picking Our Text: Archival Description, Authenticity, and the Archivist as Editor," *American Archivist* 68 (Fall/Winter 2005): 264–78; Jennifer Meehan, "Making the Leap from Parts to Whole: Evidence and Inference in Archival Arrangement and Description," *American Archivist* 72 (Spring/Summer 2009): 72–90.

<b>Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS): 14 out of 25 elements</b>	<b>Resource Discovery and Access (RDA): Attempted mapping elements relating to a Work (not an Expression, Manifestation, or Item)</b>
Reference code	Identifier for the work
Title	Title of the work
Date	Date of work
Extent	Form of work
Name of creator(s)	
Administrative/Biological history	
Custodial history	History of work
Immediate source of acquisition	
Scope and content	Content type/Other distinguishing characteristics of the work
Appraisal, destruction and scheduling information	
Accruals	
System of arrangement	
Conditions governing access	
Conditions governing reproduction and use	

**FIGURE 3.** An attempt by William E. Landis to crosswalk a selection of core data elements from *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* to data elements relating to a work available in *Resource Discovery and Access*.

bibliographic standards groups made a lot of sense, and the work of those groups had a large impact on our profession. I've noticed in the past half-decade or so, while listening to liaison reports to the Description Section, a steadily decreasing relevance of the work of groups like MARBI<sup>42</sup> and CC:DA<sup>43</sup> to the descriptive work that archivists do. I think there are a lot of indicators that these groups, almost exclusively focused on *ISBD*-facing standards, are not where SAA should be investing any significant liaison effort. It really only takes a look at the table of contents of the new RDA data content standard—with its production- and distribution-centric framework of work/expression/manifestation/item—to see how little it speaks, beyond rules for standardized formulation of names of creators and basic identification of the thing being described, to the endeavor of archival control (see Figure 3).

Looking comparatively at the Brazilian *ISAD(G)*-based national data content standard, *NOBRADE*,<sup>44</sup> since I was just there in the spring, suggests to me

<sup>42</sup> Association for Library Collections and Technical Services, "Machine-Readable Bibliographic Information Committee," <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/alcts/mgrps/cmtes/jnt-marbi.cfm>, accessed 14 August 2011.

<sup>43</sup> Association for Library Collections and Technical Services, "Committee on Cataloging: Description and Access," <http://www.libraries.psu.edu/tas/jca/ccda/>, accessed 14 August 2011.

<sup>44</sup> Conselho Nacional de Arquivos, *NOBRADE: Norma Brasileira de Descrição Arquivística* (Rio de Janeiro: Arquivo Nacional, 2006), <http://www.conarq.arquivonacional.gov.br/Media/publicacoes/nobrade.pdf>, accessed 14 August 2011.

<b>Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACs): 14 out of 25 elements</b>	<b>Norma Brasileiro de Descrição Arquivística (NOBRADE): Brazilian ISAD(G)-based content standard</b>
Reference code	Código de referência
Title	Título
Date	Data(s)
Extent	Dimensão e suporte
Name of creator(s)	Nome(s) do(s) produtor(es)
Administrative/Biological history	História administrativa/Biografia
Custodial history	História arquivística
Immediate source of acquisition	Procedência
Scope and content	Ambito e conteúdo
Appraisal, destruction and scheduling information	Avaliação, eliminação e temporalidade
Accruals	Incorporações
System of arrangement	Sistema de arranjo
Conditions governing access	Condições de acesso
Conditions governing reproduction and use	Condições de reprodução

**FIGURE 4.** A crosswalk by William E. Landis of a selection of core data elements from *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* to the Brazilian ISAD(G)-based data content standard *Norma Brasileira de Descrição Arquivística* (NOBRADE).

the place where SAA needs to invest more energetically and systematically its description liaison effort (see Figure 4). The primary reason, in spite of my lack of knowledge of Portuguese, that aligning *DACS* and *NOBRADE* is such an easy task is the underlying framework of the international standard *ISAD(G)*. Michael Fox has, since around 1996, heroically and single-handedly liaised between the ICA’s Committee on Best Practices and Standards and U.S. archivists. Funding for this effort has come from Michael and his employer, and not from SAA except on one occasion where funding for this activity was specified in a grant. In arguing for SAA to re-evaluate and refocus its descriptive standards maintenance efforts, I think one critical piece would be providing some level of overt support for a direct link between its *DACS* Technical Subcommittee and ICA’s international descriptive standards work, in which *DACS* is and should remain grounded. Doing so would ensure that the evolution of the U.S. data content standard for archival description continues along lines that facilitate broader and critically important convergences like the fairly straightforward one I’ve illustrated here. That is the simplest, though far from the only, reason why I think the time is right for the U.S. archival community to celebrate, but turn away from its roots in bibliographic standards and fully embrace the robust international world of archival standards.

## The Archival Network: You Don't Get to Describe Records without Making a Few Standards

Michael Rush

The late nineties and early part of the last decade represented a high-water mark in the development of descriptive standards within the Society of American Archivists. The release between 1998 and 2004 of EAD 1.0,<sup>45</sup> followed by EAD 2002<sup>46</sup> and *DACS*, were milestones for the archival community in the United States. SAA assumed initiative and responsibility for the creation and maintenance of the first uniquely archival metadata format and published the first national content standard to span all descriptions of archival records regardless of transmission format.

I became involved in the SAA standards community soon after this wave of activity crested. I was elected vice-chair of the EAD Roundtable in 2005 and joined the Standards Committee's Technical Subcommittee for Descriptive Standards (TSDS) in 2006, becoming chair in 2007. After the flood of activity that produced EAD and *DACS*, the momentum in archival descriptive standards shifted away from SAA. The last decade saw lots of activity by the Committee on Best Practices and Standards of the International Council on Archives. It released the second edition of *ISAAR (CPF)*, the *International Standard for Archival Authority Records (Corporate Bodies, Persons, and Families)*<sup>47</sup> in 2004; *ISDF*, the *International Standard for Describing Functions*<sup>48</sup> in 2007; and *ISDIAH*, the *International Standard for Describing Institutions with Archival Holdings*<sup>49</sup> in 2008. Within the Standards Committee and TSDS during this time, however, were a reactionary mindset, sometimes-unclear expectations, and confusing reporting lines.

Much of the activity within the Standards Committee and TSDS consisted of commenting on external standards, such as those developed by ICA. There was a notion that *DACS* and EAD required review or revision, but no mandated schedule. The Standards Committee had one Technical Subcommittee, for descriptive standards. The EAD and EAC Working Groups (the development of

<sup>45</sup> *Encoded Archival Description Tag Library, Version 1.0* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1998).

<sup>46</sup> *Encoded Archival Description Tag Library, Version 2002* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2002).

<sup>47</sup> *ISAAR (CPF): International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families* (Paris: International Council on Archives, 2004), [http://www.icacds.org.uk/eng/ISAAR\(CPF\)2ed.pdf](http://www.icacds.org.uk/eng/ISAAR(CPF)2ed.pdf), accessed 12 November 2011.

<sup>48</sup> *ISDF: International Standard for Describing Functions* (Paris: International Council on Archives, 2007), <http://www.wien2004.ica.org/sites/default/files/ISDF%20ENG.pdf>, accessed 12 November 2011.

<sup>49</sup> *ISDIAH: International Standard for Describing Institutions with Archival Holdings* (Paris: International Council on Archives, 2008), [http://www.wien2004.ica.org/sites/default/files/ISDIAH%20Eng\\_0.pdf](http://www.wien2004.ica.org/sites/default/files/ISDIAH%20Eng_0.pdf), accessed 12 November 2011.

Encoded Archival Context<sup>50</sup> being the one area of significant new activity within SAA during this period) reported to TSDS, while the *DACS* Working Group—for SAA’s flagship descriptive content standard—reported directly to the Standards Committee.

The Standards Committee recognized a problem and set about recasting itself. The members of the Standards Committee and TSDS worked over three years, from 2007 to 2010, to update the Standards Committee’s charge, rewrite the procedures for standards development and review, and revise the organizational structure of SAA’s standards-related groups. As chair of TSDS, I contributed to this work with Nancy Kunde and Polly Reynolds, chairs of the Standards Committee during this time, and Margery Sly, SAA Council liaison to the Standards Committee. In February 2010, SAA Council approved sweeping changes to the Society’s standards infrastructure.<sup>51</sup>

Notable changes included increasing the size of the Standards Committee from six to nine members; eliminating TSDS; mandating a Technical Subcommittee for each adopted standard; creating Development and Review Teams for new standards or projects requiring specialized expertise; requiring five-year review cycles for all SAA-adopted standards; clarifying the scope of the Standards Committee’s charge to include standards and best practices and defining what those are; and articulating the differences between the adoption and endorsement of standards. Council encouraged a more active Standards Committee, both reacting to work on standards throughout the profession and proactively encouraging activity within SAA. Council also approved financial support for the development of a long-sought-after standards portal on the SAA website.<sup>52</sup>

The expanded Standards Committee now has four Technical Subcommittees: one each for the four adopted standards: *EAD*, *EAC-CPF*, *DACS*, and the *Archival Facilities Guidelines*. In addition, there currently are two Development and Review Teams: the Schema Development Team, which works with both TS-EAD and TS-EAC to develop and maintain the schemas that define EAD and EAC-CPF; and the Deaccessioning and Reappraisal Development and Review Team, which released for comment in July 2011 a

<sup>50</sup> For more information on EAC, see Encoded Archival Content: Corporate Bodies, Persons, and Families, “Welcome to the EAC-CPF Homepage,” <http://eac.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/>, accessed 12 November 2011.

<sup>51</sup> “SAA Council Approves Code of Ethics Review Process, Meets with Ferriero and Funders,” *Archival Outlook* (March/April 2010): 14.

<sup>52</sup> Society of American Archivists, “Standards Portal,” <http://www2.archivists.org/standards>, accessed 8 November 2011.

draft of new *Guidelines for Reappraisal and Deaccessioning*.<sup>53</sup> After a soft launch over the summer, the Standards Portal was officially unveiled in time for the 75<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting in August 2011. It currently contains the standards approved, adopted, or endorsed by SAA Council, but will grow over time to include external standards relevant to archivists.

These changes, intended to simplify and spur standards activity within the Society, have left their mark. Today, the Standards Committee is much more active than a few years ago, and much of that activity relates to descriptive standards. The amount of current ongoing standards activity within SAA rivals or even surpasses that of the EAD/*DACS* era. The Standards Portal infrastructure is complete and content is being added. Repositories are beginning to implement *EAC-CPF*, and EAD and *DACS* are undergoing revision.

So get your popcorn ready. If current timelines hold, the summer of 2013 is going to be a blockbuster, with new versions of EAD and *DACS*, as well as the initial public release of ArchivesSpace, the new Mellon-funded project to merge the Archivists' Toolkit and Archon collection management systems.<sup>54</sup> Though not a descriptive standard in an official way, ArchivesSpace may well become a de facto standard with an immense impact on archival description.<sup>55</sup>

The standards work underway within both SAA and the international archival community will soon provide the building blocks necessary for archival description to evolve into a true archival network. The last big wave of standards work moved description online and broke down the final barriers to the notion of standardization itself. This next wave is going to push beyond online versions of print-based document genres and embrace the Web as the native format for description—dynamic, diverse, and discoverable description.

What standards will lay the foundation for the archival network? The descriptive standards published by ICA comprise the first layer: *ISAD(G)*, *ISAAR (CPF)*, *ISDF*, and *ISDIAH* collectively establish global principals for the description of records, creators, functions, and repositories. The second layer is that of national descriptive standards. Though their lineage is often much more complicated, it is useful to think of these as national adaptations of the ICA standards. This relationship between international and national standards is explicitly articulated in the introduction to *ISAD(G)*,<sup>56</sup> and *DACS* is the first

<sup>53</sup> For the call for comments on the guidelines, see Society of American Archivists, "Call for Comments Extended: Draft Guidelines for Reappraisal and Deaccessioning," <http://www2.archivists.org/call-for-comments-extended-draft-guidelines-for-reappraisal-and-deaccessioning>, accessed 12 November 2011.

<sup>54</sup> See the ArchivesSpace website at <http://www.archivesspace.org/>, accessed 8 November 2011.

<sup>55</sup> Experience with Archivists' Toolkit and Archon has already shown that the inclusion of required elements from national descriptive content standards such as *DACS* as required elements in archival content management systems promotes more standardized descriptive outputs from those systems.

<sup>56</sup> *General International Standard Archival Description*, Introduction (section I.1), 7.

instantiation of that relationship in the United States. The international encoding standards EAD and EAC-CPF are also tightly bound to their corresponding ICA standards, *ISAD(G)* and *ISAAR(CPF)* respectively.

This picture, unfortunately, is not complete. What's missing? Encoding standard manifestations of *ISDF* and *ISDIAH* are necessary future development projects. The work done on EAC-CPF should eventually lead to the development of encoding standards for other types of important context, such as functions that generate archival records. An existing Document Type Definition (DTD) developed in Spain, *Encoded Archival Guide (EAG)*,<sup>57</sup> should be updated to comply with *ISDIAH* and current encoding conventions. National content standards for describing archival creators, functions, and repositories may also need to be developed if the ICA standards prove insufficient.<sup>58</sup>

As we undertake the work necessary to revise our existing standards and contemplate creating those still needed, I would like to presume to offer in conclusion some tenets for future standards development. While not quite Martin Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses*,<sup>59</sup> I think these few principles will help ensure the standards we develop serve our current and emerging needs.

### **Usability**

The term conjures up images of bribing undergraduates with gift certificates to complete simple tasks in a new finding aid database, a process about which I am deeply skeptical. Usability, nonetheless, extends beyond the end-user interfaces in which we present description. Archivists deserve archivist-friendly standards. Our descriptive standards, both content and transmission, must be easier to implement, use, and teach. Our current standards, most notoriously EAD, require too many choices and offer too many paths that lead to the same result. We must eliminate needless complexity and ease the processes of implementing standards and generating descriptive data.

Of equal importance to archivist usability is machine usability. The complexity that slows an archivist when implementing an encoding standard also slows the programmer developing software, style sheets, and the like that are necessary for working with that standard. The unfortunate reality is that a programmer's time likely costs much more than an archivist's. For content standards, the way in which we describe records, in particular the reliance on inherited information within hierarchical descriptions, needs to be re-evaluated for

<sup>57</sup> Blanca Desantes, "The *Encoded Archival Guide (EAG)* DTD and the Censo-Guía de los Archivos de España e Iberoamérica Project," *Journal of Archival Organization* 3 (April 2005): 23–28.

<sup>58</sup> Parts II ("Describing Creators") and III ("Forms of Names") in *DACS* provide useful but incomplete guidance for the content of EAC-CPF records.

<sup>59</sup> For background, see *Wikipedia*, s.v. "The Ninety-Five Theses," [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Ninety-Five\\_Theses](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ninety-Five_Theses), accessed 12 November 2011.

its efficacy in Web search engines. The revision of *DACS* should be informed by the principles of Search Engine Optimization (SEO).<sup>60</sup>

### **Avoid Ambiguity**

Related to machine usability is the need to avoid ambiguity in our transmission standards. By ambiguity I mean the gray areas between descriptive documents and descriptive data. As currently constructed, EAD largely encodes a finding aid as a linear, hierarchical text document. This was a necessary design decision to encourage adoption, but an unfortunate effect has been that the standard handles the more datalike information included in finding aids poorly. In addition to being access tools, archival descriptions also serve as collection management tools.<sup>61</sup> Information necessary for collection management—archival data such as the identification of containers, extent, and so forth—should be transmitted in such a way that it is as unambiguous to a machine as it is to a human reader.

The <container> element is a pet peeve of mine. If you have two components that each have <container> subelements with identical type attributes and element values, there is no easily implemented way to be certain that those two container elements refer to the same container without considering their context within the <dsc>.<sup>62</sup> This ambiguity complicates any effort to derive accurate and usable information about containers from EAD, and I hope it is addressed in the upcoming revision.

### **Embrace Ambiguity**

Though our transmission standards need to accommodate a more data-friendly approach to eliminate ambiguity where possible, descriptive content standards should at least acknowledge, if not embrace, the sometimes-ambiguous information contributed by users online or elsewhere.

<sup>60</sup> For background, see *Wikipedia*, s.v. “Search Engine Optimization,” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search\\_engine\\_optimization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization), accessed 12 November 2011.

<sup>61</sup> The impact of archival content management system software (e.g., Archivists Toolkit, Archon, Eloquent Archives, ICA AtoM) on this dual purpose of the traditional print finding aid is something currently difficult to measure. It is, however, an important issue for archivists to be attuned to in the next several decades. See Lisa Spiro, *Archival Management Software: A Report for the Council on Library and Information Resources* (Washington, D.C.: CLIR, 2009), <http://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/spiro2009.html>, accessed 18 December 2011.

<sup>62</sup> It is possible to create a relationship between two containers using the ID and PARENT attributes. If one <container> has an ID value, another <container> may be assigned a PARENT attribute with that value, indicating a clear relationship. However, the implementations I am familiar with, most notably the EAD exported by the Archivists’ Toolkit, use this mechanism to indicate when one <container> is contained within another, for example a folder within a box. I’ve never seen it used to indicate an identity relationship, though theoretically it could be adapted for that purpose.



## Links

The notion of an archival network depends on links existing between components of archival description. A network consists of nodes and the links joining them. It is critical for archival descriptive standards to make structured and semantically meaningful links a core feature. EAC-CPF sets an example for EAD and other future encoding standards to imitate. The <relations> element of a CPF record allows for links to other CPF instances, links to resources, and links to functions.<sup>63</sup> A vocabulary for defining the nature of the link accompanies each of those types of links. With those three pieces of information, two nodes and the nature of the link between them, relations in CPF capture the information essential to Linked Data and the semantic Web.<sup>64</sup> All archival standards, content or transmission, need to work along similar lines, enabling webs of links between instances of EAD, EAC-CPF, and future encodings of archival data.

I would also argue that our encoding standards should go a step further, accommodating multiple URLs for the same semantic link. Links are necessary both for presentation and computation. We often provide links to versions of descriptions rendered in HTML. To encourage the sharing and repurposing of metadata, we need to regularly and predictably expose links to our source metadata, XML or otherwise.

## Tools, Not Tags

As archival description transmission standards evolve to become more data friendly and less document centric, the tools we use to maintain our descriptions need to evolve as well. As much as many archivists, me included, love working with XML and get a little rush each time an EAD instance validates, there is nothing archival in the work of encoding. We need to move beyond our angle bracket fetish to develop and implement tools that allow us to focus on archival tasks. In an ideal world, EAD and EAC-CPF would be opaque to all but a few expert users, created when needed as secondary outputs from efficient and adaptable software tools<sup>65</sup> with archivist-optimized interfaces.

<sup>63</sup> Encoded Archival Context Working Group of the Society of American Archivists and the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, *EAC-CPF Tag Library*, <http://www3.iath.virginia.edu/eac/cpf/tagLibrary/cpfTagLibrary.html>, accessed 11 November 2011.

<sup>64</sup> For background, see *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Linked Data," [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linked\\_data](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linked_data) and *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Semantic Web," [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semantic\\_Web](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semantic_Web), accessed 12 November 2011.

<sup>65</sup> For example, the software assessed in Spiro, *Archival Management Software*.

### ***Standardize Nonarchival Tasks***

Encoding XML is not the only nonarchival task that draws us away from archival description itself. Developing XSLT style sheets for transforming EAD or EAC-CPF into HTML or PDF for distribution via the Web requires programming skills that are not trivial. While this is not beyond the aptitude of an archivist with competent computer skills, development of this expertise requires an investment of time and money. The ongoing popularity of SAA's Style Sheets for Publishing EAD workshop<sup>66</sup> is evidence of this. In situations where an archivist with time or talent is unavailable, hiring someone with the necessary skills is prohibitively expensive for many institutions. Furthermore, the tendency of each archives or consortium to develop its own style sheets for displaying EAD leads to finding aid displays that vary, slightly or dramatically, from one institution to another. Though it may satisfy our desires for control over our descriptions, local tradition, and branding, this ultimately does a disservice to researchers. Variations in how different systems index and search descriptions are also arbitrary and confusing. It might take a decade, but it is time for the archival profession to undertake the serious user interface research necessary to establish best practices for the search and display of archival description and commit to investing in the Web development necessary to create sharable tools for implementing them. Like developing tools for creating standardized archival description, creating standards and shared tools for delivering archival descriptions will allow us to focus on our core responsibilities.

### ***Embrace Internationalization***

Finally, SAA must continue to expand its embrace of internationalization. We currently have an odd arrangement wherein the international archives organization, ICA, develops and maintains international descriptive standards, while a national archives organization, SAA, develops and maintains international encoding standards. This situation works in part because the groups that govern EAD and EAC-CPF have sought out diverse international representation and leadership, and have more formally acknowledged the international status of their standards with gestures such as hosting the website for EAC-CPF at the Berlin State Library. SAA must continue this practice and expand it if possible, perhaps by collaborating directly with ICA.

<sup>66</sup> See the SAA online continuing education course catalog, Society of American Archivists, "Style Sheets for EAD: Delivering Your Finding Aids on the Web," <http://www2.archivists.org/prof-education/course-catalog/style-sheets-for-ead-delivering-your-finding-aids-on-the-web>, accessed 11 November 2011.

Given these principles for future standards development, what should SAA's agenda be for the next decade? After the revisions of EAD and DACS are complete, creating companion encoding standards for *ISDF* and *ISDIAH* should be a top priority. Simultaneously, the Society should support or seek out sponsorship for research into best practices for the display and searching of archival descriptions, as well as for capturing user-generated description. When these components are in place, and with sufficient investment in educational opportunities for archivists, it will be possible to build a Web application that realizes the promise of an archival network. These, then, should be SAA's roles within the realm of descriptive standards: assuming responsibility for national standards, providing leadership and collaboration for international standards, identifying and developing necessary best practices, standards dissemination and education, and encouraging the development of common tools.

### **Commentary: A U.K. Perspective**

*William Stocking*

I accepted the mission to comment on this session with some trepidation as I knew there would be three excellent and thought-provoking papers, and as we have seen I was right. Reading the papers, I was immediately struck by both the similarities and the differences in the drama of standards development and adoption for archival description as it has unfolded in the United Kingdom and the United States. By way of introduction, I must of course emphasize that what follows is only from the viewpoint of one archivist, myself, and applies to the United Kingdom alone. I expect my European colleagues would also be able to tell their own similar but different stories.

In generational terms, I fit somewhere in the middle here being a sixties child, who, in the tradition of my generation, started working life a little late, so my archival experience really dates to the late 1980s when I underwent my training. At that stage, I think we were, as a profession, a little behind our colleagues in the United States. There was no central effort to introduce description standards as such, the then Public Record Office (PRO, now the National Archives) was automating some of its systems but did generally not see itself as having a wider role (something, as I'll be saying, that changed). Others of the players set out by Kathleen within the profession, however, were beginning to get excited by automation and standards for archival description, which they saw going hand in hand.

There was, then, an instance of the farsighted individual, in the shape of Michael Cook, who taught me in the postgraduate archive course at Liverpool University. We used the first (and very different) edition of *A Manual for Archival*

*Description*<sup>67</sup> (generally cited as *MAD!*), which was more of a typology of finding aids than a manual, and it triggered my enthusiasm for descriptive standards.

The professional body in the United Kingdom, the then Society of Archivists (now the Archives and Records Association), also commissioned a report on archival description in 1988,<sup>68</sup> carried out by Michael Cook, which called for an archival version of UKMARC: UKMARC AMC. This effort did not bear fruit, however, due to initial opposition from my current employer (the British Library), until the mid 1990s.<sup>69</sup> The then Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts (HMC, now part of the National Archives) had also been leading in this area by developing the automated National Register of Archives (NRA) and supporting developments elsewhere.<sup>70</sup> Chris Kitching, of that organization, and Michael Cook were also part of the ICA body that produced the first edition of *ISAD(G)*.

At this stage, the profession was still far from universally accepting that such standards were desirable or indeed useful. That myth mentioned by Kathleen was alive and well in the United Kingdom. As an enthusiastic rookie archivist, I asked a well-respected local county archivist what she thought of the idea of description standards and was told in no uncertain terms that given that archival collections were unique, and repositories were likewise, they really were a complete waste of time!

Working at local record offices and the PRO in the early 1990s then, the cataloguing practices I followed were mainly paper based (some stand-alone databases were to be found) and followed local rules which had nothing explicitly to do with UKMARC AMC, *MAD*, or indeed *ISAD(G)*. This all changed as the 1990s progressed. We too saw the convergence of which Kathleen spoke, which pushed the need for standards for description to the fore. Demand increased for access to archival materials, particularly among the emerging bands of family historians. A growing professionalism created a new generation of archivists excited by the opportunities offered by new technologies for automation and access, particularly in the form of what we were then calling the World Wide Web.

All parts of the profession also saw the need from their different perspectives and looked around for a standard for description that was easy for archivists to pick up and use, flexible enough to work with legacy catalogs, and yet vitally allowed the representation of the contexts of creation and use of archival

<sup>67</sup> Michael Cook, *Manual of Archival Description* (London: Society of Archivists, 1985).

<sup>68</sup> Michael Cook, *Archival Description Project* (Liverpool: University of Liverpool, 1988).

<sup>69</sup> Alan Hopkinson, *UKMARC AMC: Unpublished Draft Rev 4.0: UK MARC Format for Archives and Manuscripts Control (UK MARC AMC)*, <http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/5196/>, accessed 15 September 2011.

<sup>70</sup> See The National Archives, "Welcome to the National Register of Archives," <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/nra/default.asp>, accessed 5 November 2011.

material; that is, one that was archival rather than bibliographic. We did not have to look far, of course, to see that *ISAD(G)* fitted the bill very well indeed. We found that rather than being an imposition upon our practice, it actually reflected what we already did in our different ways. This should come as no surprise perhaps given the strong U.K. input into its development that I've already mentioned. *ISAD(G)* was very quickly adopted and remains the cornerstone of our descriptive practice today. A key difference then was that we were not, as Bill has today argued was the case in the United States, attempting to squeeze archival finding aids into the standards automating the bibliographic card catalog.

Leadership now came from the PRO, where a clear-sighted new chief executive, Sarah Tyacke, saw a role for standards in her push to automate and provide greater access. She began the process that would deliver the organization's online catalog at the turn of the millennium.<sup>71</sup> In the higher education sector, a high-profile review of special collections and archives found large backlogs in cataloging hindering access.<sup>72</sup> Funding was provided with the caveat that the resulting finding aids had to be made available online. Colleagues in the higher education sector joined those at the PRO looking for tools that might enable this and found a beta version of something called Encoded Archival Description (EAD). Importantly then, unlike in the United States, the descriptive content standard *ISAD(G)* came first, and EAD was always seen as a tool to represent it electronically, rather than as a protocontent standard in its own right. Consequently, we use a very light version of EAD in the United Kingdom. We also encode hierarchy as mandated by *ISAD(G)*, that is, at all levels using the terms *fonds*, *series*, *file*, and *item*. As one does, I took this view for granted and was surprised, when working with U.S. colleagues on RLG's *Best Practice Guidelines for Encoded Archival Description*<sup>73</sup> early in the new century, that they saw no need to name each and every level of the hierarchy and didn't agree at all as to what the levels should be called.

With local record offices, the mainstay of archive service provision in the United Kingdom, the market saw an opportunity and the first commercial databases were developed and implemented. These also embedded the hierarchical model provided by *ISAD(G)*. Most cataloging today is carried out in the current versions of these proprietary systems, and manual capture using EAD (and the resulting angle bracket fetish noted by Mike) remains rare. EAD's main functions in the United Kingdom have been to retro-convert legacy finding

<sup>71</sup> For more information on the U.K. National Archives, including information about its holdings, see the National Archives, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>, accessed 5 November 2011.

<sup>72</sup> Joint Funding Council's Libraries Review Group, *Report (The Follett Report)* (December 1993), <http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/services/papers/follett/report/>, accessed 15 September 2011.

<sup>73</sup> RLG EAD Advisory Group, *RLG Best Practice Guidelines for Encoded Archival Description* (August 2002), <http://www.oclc.org/research/activities/past/rlg/ead/bpg.pdf>, accessed 15 September 2011.

aids and exchange them. The two largest EAD datasets in the United Kingdom are the *Access to Archives* (or *A2A*) and *Archives Hub* federated services.<sup>74</sup>

In terms of standards development, it could be argued that we rather shamelessly stole those of others! This was not true in one case, though, as the need in automated environments of consistently forming the names of contextual entities was identified. Here, two national strategic bodies, the HMC, which I've already mentioned, and the National Council on Archives, joined forces to form working groups of professionals from all sectors to develop the *Rules for the Construction of Personal, Place and Corporate Names*, known universally as the *NCA Rules*.<sup>75</sup> These, Bill may be pleased to hear, took a robustly archival standpoint and have enshrined key differences in practice to *AACR2*.

So, what in all this was the role of our professional body, the Society of Archivists? There are some similarities to the role played by the SAA, but with differences in scale reflecting, perhaps, those between the U.S. and U.K. professions. While the Society provided leadership by adopting *ISAD(G)* and related standards, its greatest role has been in the area of education and training. I was one of a number who were part of a road show to introduce *ISAD(G)* throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland in the late 1990s. In 1999, I was also the first training officer of the newly formed EAD and Data Exchange Special Interest Group of the Society. This was similar in some respects to the SAA's EAD Roundtable and trains members in EAD and mark-up languages more generally. It continues this role today as the Data Standards Group. Our professional body has not, even in partnership with other bodies, ever been a standards development or maintenance organization.

The reality is that it is not in a position to do so and, indeed, no other body, except perhaps the National Archives, is in a position to do so either. Since 2000, no such work has taken place in the United Kingdom. In our pragmatic way, we have been busy retro-converting legacy data, tackling backlogs, and getting our finding aids online with basic search interfaces and, increasingly, links to digital representations to the records themselves. Other areas have taken their share of our time, increasing outreach work with users and communities, and the digital preservation of born-digital records to name but two. So we have no content standard to rival *DACS* and have yet to revise our increasingly eccentric rules for the formation of person, corporate, and place names. Rather, as individuals, usually with the support of our institutions, we contribute to standards development and maintenance with international partners, whether on the ICA's descriptive standards committees or the EAD and EAC-CPF working

<sup>74</sup> The former is available at The National Archives, "Access to Archives," <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/>, and the latter at Archives Hub, "Welcome," <http://archiveshub.ac.uk/>, accessed 15 September 2011.

<sup>75</sup> National Council on Archives, *Rules for the Construction of Personal, Place and Corporate Names* (1997), <http://anws.llgc.org.uk/ncarules/title.htm>, accessed 16 September 2011.

groups. This is similar perhaps to Bill's model for the future direction of development in the United States, without the funding of a professional body.

This brings us to the future. Here I agree with most of what has been said: Now is a moment of great change in which, to quote Mike, we need to *embrace the Web as the native format for more dynamic, diverse, and discoverable description*. In recognizing the layers of relationships among standards, I think something is missing from the top layer of current ICA standards—a reference model (a vocabulary or ontology perhaps) that defines the entities in the archival domain and the relationships between them. We wait with interest to see what the current cycle of work of the ICA standards committee delivers next year, but we are seeing interesting work elsewhere in this area. From the United Kingdom, we have heard about the Linked Open Copac Archives Hub (LOCAH) project<sup>76</sup> at SAA this week, which has modeled the EAD instance as linked open data. We will be looking at this I'm sure in the context of the EAD revision.

The tenants for standards development set out by Mike will also inform that revision. In particular, I strongly agree that we need to capture data about our collections in partnership with our user communities, and this will affect the nature of our standards as well. From what I've said today you won't be surprised to hear that I also agree with both Bill and Mike that we need to continue and increase internationalization in our work. These two tenets seem to me key in the future when, as well as opening up our data, we will also need to open up the way we work as professionals. While, from the U.S. perspective, I take Bill's point about the shift in view from the bibliographic to the archival, I do think we must also be open to that community and indeed to the broader information world more generally. In the United Kingdom, we now find, I think, that those archivally based rules for the formation of names that I've mentioned have become something of a hindrance as we begin to open up and share our data. We must work with and in the same ways as others where appropriate, because, if we don't I suspect, given the relative position of archives and archivists in this wider world, we (and not necessarily our collections) will be ignored. We will not then be doing our job, as Bill suggests, of transmitting all the information in our records to future generations to understand and use. After all, we come to the debate with an important contribution—an understanding of the need to document all of the contexts of an object—and if we are not part of that debate I fear that as the digital information world moves on, to coin a phrase, the archival baby will get thrown out with the bathwater!

<sup>76</sup> For more information about the Linked Open Copac Archives Hub (LOCAH) Project, see JISC, "Linked Open Copac Archives Hub," <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/inf11/jiscexpo/locah.aspx>, and also that project's blog at <http://blogs.ukoln.ac.uk/locah/>, accessed 16 September 2011.

## Concluding Thoughts from the Chair

Steven L. Hensen

With respect to the basic bibliographic structure of archival description, let me say two things. First, at the time of the National Information Systems Task Force and its development of the MARC AMC format, other nonbibliographic-based options were considered. Ultimately, they were rejected in favor of a more archivally friendly version of the Machine Readable Cataloging data structure standard that then underpinned (and still does) all online library cataloging systems. The reasons for this were twofold. There was already an active support and development structure for these formats that the archival community could effectively “piggy-back” onto, by way of ensuring the long-term stability and evolution of the work archivists were doing. In addition, the version of MARC that grew into MARC AMC was, insofar as these things were then understood, easily able to accommodate the requirements of archival description and, with its control element (the *C* in AMC), manage a certain number of processes that many archivists felt were essential. As it turned out, the *C* was used in only a limited way, but it laid the groundwork for such future developments as EAD and DACS. In any event, the fact that tens of thousands of MARC AMC records were created in the first few years of its existence seems to support the wisdom of that decision.

Secondly, the bibliographic underpinnings of archival description provided in MARC AMC and the companion data content standard, the AACR2-compatible *Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts*, permitted the easy integration of archival “cataloging” into hitherto strictly bibliographic utilities. Especially in the case of RLG’s Research Libraries Information Network, it quickly became clear that such networks could move beyond being simple shared cataloging systems and start to realize their potential as fully articulated cultural information systems. Even as archival description moves away from its bibliographic structure toward a more *ISAD*-based model, this will only work if archival information is still integrated with other cultural resources metadata.

In her doctoral dissertation, Susan Davis touches somewhat on the social aspect of the development of archival descriptive standards. While the matter of building on shared expertise is certainly important, it is interesting that most of the standards that have been developed over the past thirty years involve, in greater and lesser degrees, the same core group of individuals. The fact that I may be the most constant thread running through all of this is less a reflection of my abilities and contributions than it is of my willingness to write grant applications. As new projects were developed, the participation and support of individuals who had worked on previous successful undertakings became an essential component of their credibility. The fact that we all became good friends was perhaps inevitable and contributed to the overall synergy.



## Audience Comments and Questions

William E. Landis captured discussion and comments between the audience and members of the panel from the recording of the session. Some light editing was done to the spoken comments to make them clearer as printed text.

*Susan E. Davis*

Having had my name mentioned a few times today, I feel at liberty to do this. There are two things I wanted to say, and one was picked up by your comment and all along, the shift from doing the bibliographic to the archival thing. Everybody up here is absolutely correct, there was no way, in the beginning, that SAA had the strength to do this alone. People talked about it, looked at Elaine [Engst]'s elements, and one of the remarkable things is that they managed to take something that was inherently library, inherently bibliographic, and make it work for archivists. That allowed all the later stages, because EAD and everything since has been done by archivists, in archival contexts, cooperating with other organizations, but it has been inherently archival. It took that first iteration, that first bridge, to enable that to happen. So I think that can't be emphasized enough.

The other thing is that I started working on this because I was looking at leadership in the profession, and I was trying to figure out how people became leaders in a professional context when they're balancing the needs of work and their professional identity, wearing both hats. I tried to figure out what was a really critical issue in the profession that brought us from point A to point B. As I looked at it, it was this first description of MARC AMC that was as critical an event as has ever happened for the profession. Now Vicki/Kathleen alluded to people being born in the same year and that's true, there was this cohort, there's this sociological term called *community of practice*, which is what this group became. But we talk a lot about leadership in the profession now, and we have a leadership institute—if you look at those people who were the key players in these early stages, they became Fellows, Janice [Ruth] last night, they were elected to Council, they ran for president. These were the people who were able to bridge their work and their professional interests in ways that not only advanced the profession, but were clear paths to leadership. So I advocate this for other people who are interested in becoming leaders—this is how you do it, okay? You find something that works for your job, that the profession is interested in, and you go for it, you participate. That's how it works.

**Steven L. Hensen**

I just want to amplify what Susan said a little bit more. This whole thing eventually boiled out of this cauldron of the National Information Systems Task Force, and I use that term with some clarity. It was a bunch of cranky people. The group was originally formed, as I understand it, to resolve a jurisdictional dispute between the National Historical Publications and Records Commission and the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections, and it was sort of at that point where we started thinking that we may need to develop a common way of doing this. I've got to tell you that the idea of doing this, of moving toward this MARC structure, was not a popular one at the beginning. It wasn't until Elaine published her common descriptive elements that we understood that gosh, we really are doing a lot of the same things. As I say, there were a lot of cranky people in that group. NISTF took, let's face it, over three years to get that work done, and at the end it was a fairly straightforward, simple process, but there was a lot of blood, sweat, and tears on the floor (more blood than sweat and tears perhaps). It was quite a process, not nearly so friendly as subsequent efforts at standards.

**Jean Dryden**

The other piece that had to be there, it clearly wasn't missing, is that you've got to have passion for whatever cause or issue you take on, that is of interest to the profession, in order to develop your leadership skills. Because I would say that the passion for this—despite the blood, the tears, the pushing and shoving that took place sometimes—is what I think sustained this group through decades, to start the work and continue it on.

**Steven L. Hensen**

That's right. Well, in fact, although I will never take full credit, I think a lot of this came out of the passion coming out of my outrage over the version of chapter 4 of *AACR2* that was plunked on my desk in the late seventies at the Library of Congress. It was so different from what we were doing then, even in a nonstandards environment, that the Manuscript Division decided that we needed to respond to this. And the more I looked at it, the more my blood was boiling. They simply did not understand. I can't tell you how many times I wrote large "MANUSCRIPTS ARE NOT BOOKS, MANUSCRIPTS ARE NOT BOOKS." You know, "the chief source of information has to be the title page" . . . you ignoramus, there is no title page! I will say that over the years I've enjoyed tweaking Michael Gorman over these very points—they really did not understand our

world at all. I think it was the outrage on my part that fueled some of that passion and moved us forward, especially when I saw how well these things started to work and fall together the way they did.

**Peter Hirtle**

I'm going to do a comment, and question for Bill Landis. I was chair of CAIE [SAA's Committee on Archival Information Exchange] when *ISAD(G)* came in, and my recollection is that, in spite of all the good work that Sharon [Thibodeau] had done on the ICA committee trying to do it, it wasn't very good and it wasn't very useful in comparison to what we were already doing in-house. It was because Michael [Fox] came along and started spending some time on improving it that we got something that was really positive. That was my comment. My question is, thinking about the future and this idea of an archival standard. Is that outside then, completely, of the kind of . . . I don't want to call it bibliographic utility anymore but a shared environment? Is the idea that somehow archival works will exist on the Internet by themselves and we will use Google, and that will be enough? Are we giving up entirely on the idea that our *ISAD(G)*-based archival descriptions are residing in some kind of shared, common system?

**William E. Landis**

I don't think we are giving up on that, but I do think that technologically we're at a point where that notion of what a common system is changes. We are rapidly moving away from bibliographic catalogs (OPACs) that use the native MARC format to construct indexes. And what's important in this new world are crosswalks, so that you can build indexes however you want, but you understand, with archival encoding standards and bibliographic encoding standards, where the commonalities are to build indexes and provide access. Just as one example, my own institution [University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill] now has an Endeca-based catalog that maps MARC out of MARC and into its own native indexing structure, and we have dumped our EAD-encoded finding aids into that same catalog so they're full-text searchable within the library catalog. That's a really different model from the notion that you do the EAD and then somehow extract the MARC. I think we're moving to a world where, yes, the goal is still the same, but the technologies we use to get to that goal are different.

Your question about Google is, I think, a really good one. We build these systems, but all the research shows that people are getting to our stuff via Google, so it becomes much more important that we understand how to push our stuff up to that layer as opposed to trying to focus on having these beautiful, fine-tuned catalogs that nobody's using.

**About the panelists:**

**Steven L. Hensen** retired in 2010 after twenty-four years at Duke University's Rubenstein Special Collections Library and after more than forty years as an archivist. A Fellow and past president of the Society of American Archivists, he is the compiler of *Archives, Personal Papers and Manuscripts: A Cataloging Manual for Archival Repositories, Historical Societies, and Manuscript Libraries* (1989).

**William E. Landis** is the head of Public Services, Manuscripts and Archives at Yale University. He has previously worked at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the University of California, JSTOR, and the Cranbrook Educational Community. He was a member of the Canadian-United States Task Force on Archival Description. A Fellow of the Society of American Archivists, he currently serves on the SAA Council.

**Kathleen D. Roe** is the director of Archives and Records Management Operations at the New York State Archives, where she has served in a variety of capacities since 1979. A Fellow of the Society of American Archivists, she is the author of the Archival Fundamentals Series II volume, *Arranging and Describing Archives and Manuscripts* (2005).

**Michael Rush** is the accessioning archivist/EAD coordinator at Yale University's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. In addition he coordinates the development and maintenance of finding aid systems across Yale University Library. He currently serves as co-chair of the Society of American Archivists' Technical Subcommittee for Encoded Archival Description (TS-EAD) and is leading the EAD revision process.

**William Stocking** is the British Library's business lead for the Integrated Archives and Manuscripts System (IAMS) project to develop a new cataloging system for archives and manuscripts and integrate it with other corporate systems for access and exchange. He previously worked at the U.K.'s National Archives where he managed the Online Catalogue and the Access to Archives Programme (A2A). An internationally acknowledged expert on archival description and the online access to archival information, he currently serves as co-chair of the Society of American Archivists' Technical Sub-committee for Encoded Archival Description (TS-EAD).

**Victoria Irons Walch** served as executive director of the Council of State Archivists (CoSA) for more than twenty years. She is a Fellow of the Society of American Archivists and was the principal research consultant for the A\*CENSUS—Archival Census and Education Needs Survey in the United States (2004).