

Minutes of the 1997 Description Section Meeting

The Description Section met during the SAA Annual Meeting in Chicago on Saturday, 30 August 1997. About 60 people attended the meeting. The Chair, Heather Heywood, called the meeting to order at 8:00 am.

Heather opened the meeting by introducing the Vice-Chair, Lora Bloom, and the Descriptive Notes newsletter editor, Ann Hodges. Due to health problems last year, the Vice-Chair was unable to participate in Section work and asked to remain Vice-Chair for another year.

I. The first part of the meeting consisted of reports from SAA committees and SAA representatives to bodies involved in descriptive standards.

- (1) SAA Committee on Archival Information Exchange (CAIE) - Kris Kiesling, Chair
Kris Kiesling discussed the recent report of the Task Force on Organizational Effectiveness (TFOE), which recommended that the CAIE and the Standards Board be merged to become part of a new Standards Committee. CAIE and the Standards Board have formed a task force to study the proposal and prepare a report for consideration by Council at its January meeting. The task force is composed of Kris Kiesling, Bill Landis, Elaine Engst, and Steve Hensen. Plans call for the addition of a fifth, outside member.

Encoded Archival Description (EAD): Kris reported that, in the past year, she and Michael Fox had taught 13 two-day EAD workshops under the aegis of the Research Libraries Group (RLG), training about 230 people. The workshop has been handed over from RLG to the SAA, and the bulk of EAD training will now be handled by SAA.

The EAD Working Group will consider all proposals for revisions to the DTD at a meeting in the fall. Changes will be handled by the Library of Congress. Drafts of the EAD Tag Library and the Applications Guidelines have been available since late 1996. (They can be found at <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/findaids/ead/guidelines/index.html>). Jackie Dooley is working on the formal publication of these two documents.

- (2) OCLC - Susan Westberg
OCLC is looking for feedback on what is meant by requests for a "bigger bib." Do archivists want larger records stored on-line, or larger records for off-line services, such as cards and tapes?

OCLC is serving as an archive for the journals available through its Electronic Collections Online. Participating publishers agree to allow OCLC to store their journals in perpetuity and provide perpetual access to subscribing libraries. Even after a library discontinues a journal subscription, OCLC has the right to provide ongoing access to the volumes subscribed to. In addition, OCLC's archiving role includes regular backups of the system and journal content, off-site storage, and a commitment to migrate both the system and the contents of the journals available through the service to keep pace with changing technology.

Record conversions: When Format Integration Phase II issues related to type of record (leader 06, codes t and p) are resolved, OCLC plans to go forward with the database scan for obsolete AMC format records and convert them to the appropriate format(s) as best they can.

- (3) ALA Committee on Cataloging: Description and Access (CC:DA) - Michael Fox
Michael reported that, although much of the CC:DA's work has little impact on archives, its Task Force on Metadata is worth monitoring. The task force is currently looking at the interrelationship of various metadata standards (e.g., Dublin Core, EAD, TEI). Michael is a member of the task force, representing the archival perspective on these issues.
- (4) US MARC Advisory Board - Rutherford Witthus
Rudy gave a very informative report about changes to the MARC standards which affect the archival community. (A summary of his report can be found [here](#).)
- (5) CFW Coker Prize - Ellen Garrison
Ellen talked briefly about the guidelines for the CFW Coker Prize, and she emphasized that it is intended to recognize finding aids, finding aid systems, projects that involve innovative development in archival description, or descriptive tools that enable archivists to produce more effective finding aids. There are no restrictions on the format in which information is presented (e.g., printed, electronic, microform), and both published and unpublished works are eligible. Nominations for the 1998 Coker Prize must be submitted by 28 February 1998. Ellen encouraged Description Section members to nominate finding aids or tools that they think have a substantial impact on descriptive practices. Self-nominations are also possible.
- (6) International Conference on the Principles and Future Development of AACR2 - Steve Hensen
Steve reported that this meeting, to be held in Toronto from 23-25 October 1997, will review the original 1961 Paris Principles, upon which AACR is based. Steve and Kent Haworth (from York University, Toronto, Canada) have been invited to represent the archival community. Efforts to align APPM, RAD (Rules for Archival

Description), and ISAD(G) (General International Standard - Archival Description) are on hold, awaiting the outcome of the Toronto meeting, since changes to AACR2 could have an impact on archival descriptive standards. In response to a question from the audience, Steve confirmed that he is confident that some sort of North American archival descriptive standard can be agreed upon.

- II. The next agenda item was discussion of session proposals for the 1998 SAA Annual Meeting. Suggestions included uses of SGML, the status of archival description (to be sponsored jointly by the Description Section and CAIE), description of artifacts and ephemera, a study of the relationships between components comprising the online descriptive system, user studies on the effectiveness of electronic finding aids, and a look at how EAD works in smaller institutions.
- III. The remainder of the meeting focused on planning for the future.

(1) Task Force on Organizational Effectiveness (TFOE)

Sharon Thibodeau, outgoing SAA Council member and the Council liaison for the Description Section, presented the recommendations of the TFOE report regarding sections and roundtables. TFOE recommended that sections should be more directly involved in the leadership of SAA and suggested the following definition for sections:

Sections are standing units initiated by petition to Council from representatives of a professional affinity who wish to undertake activities or projects deemed important to members' interests as well as those that further SAA's mission and strategic plan.

Roundtables, on the other hand, would be informal discussion groups and would have no reporting or planning requirements.

After reviewing TFOE's recommendations, the Sub-Committee on Sections and Roundtables presented a counterproposal to Council, suggesting that the distinction between sections and roundtables be eliminated in favor of establishing "member interest groups," to be defined as:

discussion groups within the Society that meet together and communicate to share information and discuss issues of mutual interest. These officially sanctioned groups may focus on archival functions or techniques, the character of records or their sources, or professional identity, as examples.

There was some discussion about the two proposals, with a number of questions raised about dues and the scheduling of meeting time during the Annual Meeting. Sharon indicated that Council had established two task forces, one on the Annual Meeting and one on Dues and Member Benefits, and that no final decisions about sections and roundtables

would be taken until these two task forces had reported.

(2) Goals and Objectives

In view of the various organizational changes that may occur in the Society over the next year or two, the Chair suggested that the Description Section should spend some time thinking about its objectives and prepare a written goals and objectives statement. This issue had been discussed at the CAIE meeting the previous Wednesday, and two members of CAIE had volunteered to form a joint task force to draft a charge for the Section. The two CAIE volunteers are Bill Landis and Rob Spindler. The Chair asked for a volunteer from the Section membership to join her on this task force. Kim Efird volunteered.

(3) Reviving the Finding Aids Fair

There seemed to be general interest in trying to revive the Finding Aids Fair, and several suggestions were made for ways to expand the Fair. The Chair asked for a volunteer to help coordinate the event. Rita Wallace volunteered. There was also a suggestion that SAA consider publishing a compendium of sample finding aids. This suggestion will be forwarded to the Publications Committee.

(4) Description Section Web Site

There was some discussion about the usefulness of creating a web site for the Description Section. It was suggested that the Section newsletter could note items that had been posted on the web site (such as reports from SAA representatives to other bodies), which would remind people to check the site, and that paper copies of such items could be sent to members without Internet access upon request. Longer reports could also be posted on the web site. Nicole Bouche volunteered to create a test site.

The meeting adjourned at 10:00 am.

Heather Heywood