

Minutes of the 1998 Description Section Meeting

The Description Section met during the SAA Annual Meeting in Orlando, Florida, on Thursday 3 September 1998.

Approximately 60 people attended the meeting. The Chair, Heather Heywood, called the meeting to order at 10:30 am.

I. Reports from SAA Committees and SAA Representatives

1. CAIE/TSDS (Committee on Archival Information Exchange/Technical Subcommittee on Descriptive Standards) - Kris Kiesling, Chair

Kris Kiesling reported that CAIE had spent last year reconfiguring itself in accordance with the recommendations of the Task Force on Organizational Effectiveness (TFOE). The SAA Standards Board has become the SAA Standards Committee, and CAIE has become a subcommittee of this Standards Committee, and is called the Technical Subcommittee on Descriptive Standards (TSDS). The charge for TSDS is similar to the charge of the former CAIE and states that TSDS is "responsible for developing, maintaining, monitoring, and promulgating standards used by archivists to describe their holdings. This includes descriptive standards developed within the SAA as well as those developed outside the archival community." (The [full charge and bylaws](#) can be found on the Description Section web site.)

TSDS consists of six appointed members. Kris introduced the members for 1998-1999 as Bill Landis (Chair), Donna di Michele, Susan McDonald, Dennis Meissner, Nicole Bouché, and Alden Monroe.

Work programme items for TSDS for the coming year include preparing comments on ISAD(G) and revising MARBI proposal 97-7 (regarding leader/06 and leader/08).

Kris also reported on the work of the EAD Working Group (a working group of CAIE/TSDS). EAD Version 1.0 was released at the end of August 1998, and the tag library has been published. The Working Group hopes to secure funding to revise the application guidelines (originally prepared for the beta version of EAD), with completion scheduled for Spring 1999. (A fuller report on the activities of the [EAD Working Group](#) can be found on the Description Section web site.)

2. OCLC (Online Computer Library Center) - Susan Westberg

Susan reported that many internal changes had occurred at OCLC over the past year, including the appointment of Jay Jordan as new CEO. OCLC also received ISO 9001 certification in July 1998. Other internal activities were related to making processes and products Year-2000 compliant.

Susan announced three new services or product changes that may interest the archival community.

(a) The Dewey Cutter Macro is now available on the [OCLC Product Services Web page](#).

(b) Changes to the OCLC-MARC bibliographic format will be implemented in late October 1998. These changes result from changes announced by the Library of Congress.

(c) Type Codes can now be changed by users. OCLC Passport software users can change the Type Code on all unlocked or locally edited bibliographic records. CONSER users can change master records.

A fuller report from Susan is available on the Description Section web site at <http://www.library.yale.edu/~dsmith/saa/descrip.htm#Reports from SAA Liaisons>.

For more information on OCLC activities and products, visit the OCLC web site at www.oclc.org.

3. CC:DA (ALA Committee on Cataloguing: Description and Access) - Michael Fox

Michael reported that CC:DA had broadened the focus of its work this year beyond AACR2 to include other description- and access-related standards such as the Dublin Core and metadata standards. He was optimistic that this larger scope could make the work of the committee more relevant to archivists.

Michael was involved in two special working groups over the past year.

(a) Cataloguing from Metadata Task Force: This task force initially concentrated on the value of TEI headers and Dublin Core metadata as a source of cataloguing, but concluded that it needed to broaden its charge to look at other ways that metadata can be used for description. The task force has informally joined MARBI to form a Task Force on Metadata to monitor metadata developments and their potential impact on library cataloguing. Michael used his membership on this Task Force as an opportunity to introduce librarians to EAD and to talk about the archival community's needs for description and access.

(b) Rule 0.24 Revision Task Force: This task force is considering the "content vs. carrier" debate, which has largely been driven by the need to deal with electronic records and traditional records in electronic format. Ultimately, cataloguing rules such as AACR2 may need to be restructured to shift the emphasis from format to intellectual content. Archivists will need to think about the terms we use to describe our materials (e.g., definitions of "archival" and "manuscript"). Changes to the way that materials are categorized will affect the appearance and presentation of descriptive records in online catalogues, and will affect how OCLC and local catalogues organize the records in their databases. Further information about the Rule 0.24 Revision Task Force can be found on the web at

www.libraries.psu.edu/iasweb/personal/jca/ccda/tf-024a.html.

4. MARBI (US MARC Advisory Board) - Rudy Witthus

Rudy reported that much of the past year was spent on aligning the USMARC and CANMARC formats.

One new development was that the 856 linking field has been extended to the authorities format. The field can be used to link an authority record to a corporate web site or to an administrative history or scope and content note in an archival description. The intention is to improve access to information about the entity covered by the authority record.

5. Coker Award - Alexandra Gressitt

Alexandra reported that there were only four nominations for the 1998 Coker Award. She indicated that there was a need to raise professional awareness about the award and encouraged Description Section members to make nominations. Information about the [Coker Award](#), and criteria for nominations, are on both the SAA web site and the Description Section web site.

II. Section Reports

1. Descriptive Notes newsletter - Ann Hodges

Ann Hodges, the newsletter editor, appealed for feedback on and submissions to Descriptive Notes. Do members find the current focus on reports of grant projects useful? What kind of information do members want in the newsletter? What should go into the newsletter and what should go on the Section web site?

There was no reaction from the members present at the meeting. However, suggestions, comments, and submissions may be directed to the editor at any time.

2. Section web site

The Description Section web site was launched in December 1997. It is maintained by the Manuscript Unit, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. The chair especially thanked Nicole Bouché and Diana Smith for their work in mounting the site.

Tim Young reported on the web site for Diana Smith. He listed the features of the web site, which include: current and past issues of Descriptive Notes, section charge and bylaws, section leadership, membership information, a link to the SAA page regarding the Coker Award, and information about the section's annual meetings. Other sections that need to be expanded include continuing education opportunities, sites of related interest, and late breaking news/current events. Tim asked for feedback on the site, and

on whether section members found it a useful place to look for information on the section and description-related issues.

Comments and suggestions can be directed to Diana Smith at diana.smith@yale.edu.

3. Finding Aids Fair

The Chair reported that a small Finding Aids Fair had been organized for this year's SAA Annual Meeting. It would take place on Friday 4 September 1998 from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm in Exhibit Hall B, Booth 3. The theme for the FAF this year was a retrospective of Coker Award winners, from the first winner in 1984 up to and including the 1998 winner. Kris Kiesling and Michael Fox would also be providing demonstrations of EAD.

III. Section Mission Statement and Bylaws

Following some discussion at last year's Annual Meeting about the need for bylaws for the section, the Section Steering

Committee worked with two volunteers from CAIE (Bill Landis and Rob Spindler) to draft a mission statement and bylaws.

The Chair circulated copies of the draft bylaws and reviewed the main points of the document during the meeting. Some

questions and suggestions were raised from the floor. The bylaws will be revised in the light of these comments and distributed

to all members of the Description Section via the Fall issue of Descriptive Notes. They will also be available on the section

[web site](#). Comments will be accepted by the Steering Committee until the end of January or February 1999, after which point

the bylaws will be further revised if necessary. The final version of the bylaws will be mailed to all members in Spring 1999,

with a mail-in ballot for voting approval of the document.

IV. Proposals

1. Publication proposals

Jackie Dooley, Chair of the SAA Publications Board, has asked SAA committees, sections, and roundtables to develop a list of their top three to five publication priorities in the area of their unit's particular interests.

Kris Kiesling reported that the two upcoming issues of *American Archivist* are devoted to EAD, and that these two issues will be reformatted into a monograph early in 1999 and marketed internationally. The EAD Tag Library has already been published and is available through SAA. The Library of Congress Catalog Distribution Service has agreed to help advertise the availability of EAD documentation so that information about

EAD will reach a wider audience than could be accomplished solely through the SAA publications catalogue. The application guidelines will also be published by SAA when they have been revised.

No other suggestions about publication priorities were received from the floor.

2. 1999 Session proposals

The theme for next year's SAA Annual Meeting is "Meeting the Challenge of Contemporary Records." There will be a plenary session at the beginning of each day to set the theme for the day. Day One will focus on records creation; Day Two will be on preservation of records; and Day Three will address access and use of records.

A few suggestions were raised from the floor, including: - how current events affect description priorities (e.g., Nazi gold, tobacco) - a yearly session on best practices (e.g., how are people handling new developments such as MARC changes; how are people on the cutting edge actually implementing new practices) - standards for the creation of finding aids (e.g., content standards, presentation standards) - use of controlled vocabulary for access (are archivists using LCSH; how are users getting access to descriptive records?)

The new Section Steering Committee will follow up on several of these proposals. It was suggested that proposals that are not accepted by the SAA Program Committee be considered for presentation during the Description Section Annual Meeting.

V. New Steering Committee

The Chair introduced the 1998-1999 Steering Committee.

Chair: Rob Spindler; Vice-chair/Chair-elect: Holly Hodges; Newsletter editor: Ann Hodges; "At large" members: Susan Hamburger and Kathleen Dow.