

# Descriptive Notes

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The Newsletter of the Description Section of the Society of American Archivists

Summer 1992

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## Description Section to convene in Montreal

MARC, standards, and special projects lead the agenda

Montreal beckons! On Tuesday, September 15, the Description Section will meet at 8:00 am for its annual meeting. This is an excellent opportunity to catch up on what's happening in the world of archival description. The section will hear reports from SAA liaisons to numerous committees, including the ALA MARC Advisory Committee, the Committee on Archival Information Exchange (see [story](#)), and the SAA Standards Board. In addition, we will hear from participants in several special projects such as NARA's Archival and Information System Development, the Getty's Art and Architecture Thesaurus, and a NHPRC grant to develop guidelines for describing archival maps (see [story](#)). If you belong to a group that would like to give a report at the Section meeting, please contact David Carmicheal at 914-592-5614 to be added to the agenda.

And speaking of reporting, this newsletter is back in operation with the help of Dan Linke of the New York State Archives. Dan would like to hear from anyone who has news that is of interest to Description Section members. You can send news items to him at the address listed [below](#).

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## YOUR SUPPORT NEEDED FOR A SUCCESSFUL FINDING AIDS FAIR

The Description Section is again sponsoring a Finding Aids Fair at the annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists in Montreal. All submissions, regardless of subject content, will be welcome, and special encouragement is given to our Canadian members. A special feature this year is the availability of electrical outlets for those wishing to display automated finding aids. (However, these should not compete with the commercial vendors.) Either bring your finding aids to the SAA annual meeting in Montreal and drop them off at Finding Aids Fair exhibit location or mail them to:

Penelope Krosch  
University of Minnesota Archives  
10 Walter Library  
117 Pleasant St. S.E.  
Minneapolis, M N 55455

Contributors who want their samples back should mark them "To Be Returned," and pick them up before the exhibit area closes. Any questions can be directed to the above address or call (612) 624-0562, or E-mail at P-Kross@UMINN1.Bitnet.

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## NewsNotes

The **Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center** at the University of Oklahoma reports that they are completing a project in which folder-level titles and name indexing for a senator's papers have been entered into MicroMARC:AMC. Senator Fred R. Harris (D-OK) served from 1964-1972 and generated over 300 cubic feet of records. Much of the project was accomplished by employing graduate students who maintained or reconstructed the

Congressional filing system used during that period. The system provides nearly uniform title headings throughout the period which allows some degree of subject access, while the name indexing will help researchers study the relationships between the Senator and other important figures of the day.

**The RLG Government Records Project** has completed a study of the practices of several state archives and compiled its report entitled "Report on Descriptive Practices for Government Records." The report focuses on MARC tagging as a means to examine the structure of description and to discuss issues and problems, and it is hoped that it will lead to descriptive standards for government records. The report is being prepared for general distribution, and RLG officials state that when it is ready for publication, its availability will be made known through archival news sources far and wide.

**The Louis Wolfson II Media History Center**, based at the Miami-Dade Public Library, is working to complete a manual for repositories that hold local television news film or videotape. Aided by a grant from the NHPRC, the Center's manual will address issues ranging from whether an institution should even accept local television news footage, to what technical, staff, equipment, and space requirements are needed if it does. Steven Davidson, the project's coordinator, says the publication will be more of a "cookbook" than a how-to manual, as it will make recommendations based on available resources, allowing institutions to balance their holdings' needs with their available funds. Publication is expected in the second half of 1993.

**The Puerto Rican Archives of New York**, part of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies based at Hunter College, reports the successful completion of an NHPRC-funded description project of six collections relating to New York City's Puerto Rican community. The Archives, established in 1988, initially surveyed extant records in the NYC area with the aid of a NY State Documentary Heritage Program grant. It was then able to acquire papers and records of individuals and organizations active in the Puerto Rican community, including civil rights leaders, artists, and journalists. The Archives also holds numerous oral histories which document the lives of early migrants, particularly the work experience of women.

**The American Heritage Center** at the University of Wyoming recently published two new volumes: *Archives and Manuscripts: Processing Manual* and *Archives and Manuscripts: OCLC Cataloging Manual*, both compiled by Maxine Trost, Manager, Arrangement and Description. The processing manual is fifty-five pages in length, contains a table of contents and index, and includes copies of sample inventories. The cataloging manual is seventy-six pages in length describes how to enter information into both fixed and variable fields and includes seven appendices and copies of the Heritage Center's work sheet. The processing manual creates a finding aid which can easily be input into OCLC, making the 2nd book complementary to the processing manual. The manuals can be purchased at a price of ten dollars for both volumes, postage included. Please order copies from: Ms. Sally Sutherland, The American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Box 3924, Laramie, WY 82071.

**The Carnegie Branch Library for Local History**, a branch of the Boulder (Colorado) Public Library, has initiated a project that allows researchers to view their photographic holdings on-screen, thereby saving both staff time spent on retrieval and wear on the photographs. Only 2,600 of the library's 190,000 photos have been scanned and put into the system, but initial results have been tremendous, and volunteers continue to scan photographs for input. (Each photograph requires about five minutes under a Microtek scanner.) For ten cents, patrons may print out a copy of a photograph on a printer. Photographs are indexed at the folder level, and the system allows patrons to "flip" through each folder on screen. For more information, contact Lois Anderton at 303-441-3110.

**The Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society** is working to improve the descriptions of its 3,500 foot manuscripts collection and revise and automate its card catalog. The Society will update descriptions employing the MARC AMC format and Library of Congress subject headings, then revise RLIN record entries. The 130-year-old institution operated under numerous description styles over the years, and this variety often resulted in ineffective or incomplete retrieval. With the aid of an NHPRC grant, the Society hired an archivist to assist two full-time staff in the project. The strengths of the over 3,700 collections include Great Lakes ship logs, Native American papers including treaties, War of 1812 and Civil War records, land records for western New York, and local business, labor, organization, and personal papers.

**The Michigan and Family History Department** of the Grand Rapids Public Library is halfway through a two-year NHPRC grant to re-house and describe the Robinson Studio Negative Collection which documents over fifty years of a local photography studio's work. The collection spans the 1930s to the 1980s and consists of approximately 200,000 envelopes containing one-million black-and-white negatives. While the collection contains portraits of many local citizens, it also includes significant photographs of Grand Rapids's businesses and, as the studio was once the official photographer for the daily *Grand Rapids Herald*, events from the city's history. Of particular interest are photographs from a local wrecking company which contracted the studio to photograph all buildings prior to demolition. The staff is identifying commercial and newspaper images for later microfilming. They are also creating a database index, and later will issue a finding guide to the collection, as well as arrange for its listing in OCLC.

**The Maine Historical Society** has embarked on a two-year project to process, arrange, and describe 850 feet of undescribed or only semi-processed manuscripts. Spanning four centuries (though the bulk dates from the late 18th to the early 20th centuries), the papers document state and local history, maritime activity, and notable Mainers, with other strengths in genealogy and land records. Two surprise finds were an early printed copy of the Declaration of Independence which toured the state on exhibit and a War of 1812 privateer's log. Upon completion of the description work, the information will be loaded on MAINECAT, the statewide library catalog, as well as published in NUCMC.

**The Mystic Seaport Museum**, in Mystic, Connecticut, is mid-way through a one-year NHPRC grant to arrange, describe, clean, and catalog ships plans and related records. Two research associates were hired to carry out the work on the previously uncatalogued collections. The records detail ship construction from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century and include both commercial and private sailing and steam vessels. Records of some World War I government vessels are included, as well as plans of other sea-related structures such as life-saving stations and lighthouses. A guide to these records will be available in early 1993, and the descriptions will be submitted to NUCMC.

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This issue marks the return of *Descriptive Notes* which we hope to publish twice a year. You can help by sending your ideas, notes, news releases, etc. about description activities at your institution (or those repositories of the ones you love) to Dan Linke at the NY State Archives, 11D40 CEC, Empire State Plaza, Albany, NY 12230 (FAX: 518-473-9985). No story is too small!

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From North of the Border -----

## **Software experiment tries to automate description rules Working prototype to be exhibited at Montreal meeting**

Wendy Duff and Elaine Toms have received a grant from the Canadian Council of Archives to develop HyperRAD, a hypertext prototype of the *Rules for Archival Description* (RAD) using commercial text retrieval software. In addition, the project will assess the feasibility of using electronic documentation within the archival description system.

RAD, a standard for creating the description of an archival fonds and its parts, is under development by the Bureau of Canadian Archivists' Planning Committee on Descriptive Standards. The published sections that include the rules for describing textual materials and multiple media fonds will be used for the project.

RAD's highly structured format and clearly defined related 'chunks' of information make it an ideal candidate for electronic documentation and especially the hypertext model. HyperRAD will negate the limitations of the paper-based format, provide enhanced access to the rules, and eliminate the problems of maneuvering through RAD. As well, it potentially could interact synergistically with an interpretive manual, illustrated examples, tutorials, and data input to improve the economies and efficiencies of the overall archival system.

The prototype will be ready for presentation at the XII International Congress on Archives which will be held September 6-11, 1992 in Montreal, Canada. The final report assessing the prototype's feasibility and recommending future initiatives will be completed by the end of 1992.

Elaine Toms is Assistant Professor, School of Library and Information Studies, Dalhousie University, Halifax, N.S. and serves on the Planning Committee which is developing RAD. The developers may be contacted at School of Library and Information Studies, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia Canada B3P 1T7, or electronically: (Bitnet) E. Toms at ETOMS@AC.DAL.CA or W. Duff at COLARCH@AC.DAL.CA; (Envoy) DALLIS.

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## Standards committee to hold open meeting in Montreal

The SAA Committee on Archival Information Exchange is responsible for issues relating to the description of and exchange of information about archival holdings. Its charge specifically includes:

- maintaining standards for the exchange of archival information by maintaining the NISTF data elements dictionary and cooperating with the Library of Congress in the maintenance of the MARC AMC format
- promoting the development and adoption of descriptive standards for the reporting of archival management and descriptive information promoting and facilitating the establishment of inter-institutional networks and cooperative projects for the exchange of management and descriptive information
- advising and representing Council in matters relating to archival information exchange

Because of these responsibilities, a number of SAA liaisons report to CAIE, including: ALA US MARC Advisory Group; ALA Cataloging: Description and Access; Library of Congress Network Advisory Committee; and the Bureau of Canadian Archivists' Planning Committee on Descriptive Standards.

Because of its many responsibilities, CAIE currently operates with three working groups to discuss, propose, and take actions. The working groups are: Descriptive Standards; Education and Training; and Exchange Scenarios.

CAIE encourages SAA members who are interested in descriptive standards, automation, and information exchange, to attend its regular meetings at SAA. The meetings are open, and SAA members not formally appointed to the Committee are welcome to join the Working Groups to offer opinions or to take part in activities. These range from commenting on proposals for changes to the MARC formats, or commenting on items the Standards Board has requested CAIE to review, to participating in some special projects being developed on investigating the development of an archival authority format and assessing archival practices for subject indexing.

Description Section members who are attending the Montreal meeting are welcome to attend the CAIE meeting, being held from 1 pm to 7 pm on Monday, September 14. If you cannot attend, but are interested in CAIE's activities, contact the current chair, Kathleen Roe, at the New York State Archives and Records Administration, 9B44 Cultural Education Center, Albany, New York 12230. E-mail: [kroe%sedofis@sed.bitnet](mailto:kroe%sedofis@sed.bitnet).

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## Multi-institution grant maps way to cartographic access

Thousands of historical maps were the focus of a recently concluded grant awarded by the NHPRC to the Alabama Department of Archives and History, to develop and test standard description procedures for archival maps. The \$150,000 cooperative Archival Map Descriptive Practices Grant teamed Alabama with two New York repositories, the New York State Library Manuscripts and Special Collections Unit and the New York State Archives and Records Administration. The 15-month project produced a standard methodology for the description of archival series and collections consisting entirely or partly of maps. The project's goals included determining the appropriate level of description, dealing with mixed holdings of paper records and maps, handling archival printed maps, and determining a standard approach to entering information on maps into RLIN in the MARC AMC format.

Grant work included a survey of holdings in each repository to identify the number, informational attributes, physical condition, and description needs of maps. Draft description guidelines were discussed, produced, and tested. In the process, information on tens of thousands of maps from hundreds of series held at the three repositories was entered into RLIN.

The proposed guidelines will be made available (tentatively in the fall of 1992) as a bound appendix to the project's final report. Project participants hope their work will spur other institutions to active descriptive engagement with archival maps, to help insure better access to historic cartographic records and the rich store of information they hold. For further information contact Project Director Alden Monroe at the Alabama Department of Archives and History.

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