

Descriptive Notes

The Newsletter of the Description Section of the Society of American Archivists Summer 1993

From the Chair

New Orleans meeting to elect vice chair, discuss issues

We're headed for the city of New Orleans! I hope that you plan to put down your beignets and cafe au laits and leave the French Quarter at least long enough to attend the annual Description Section meeting on Thursday, September 2 from 8 am until 10 am. The section meeting will give us an opportunity to hear reports from various SAA groups, such as the Standards Board and the Committee on Archival Information Exchange, and from SAA liaisons to numerous other committees, such as the ALA MARC Advisory Committee. If your group is involved in any activities related to description, and you would like to have a representative report at the section meeting, please call me at (502) 870-7000.

Also at the annual meeting, we will discuss forming a committee to undertake revision of the 1976 SAA publication, *Inventories and Registers: A Handbook of Techniques and Examples*. David Carmicheal, last year's section chair, will chair the committee and is looking for volunteers to help with the revision. The SAA Editorial Board is interested in entertaining a proposal for this publication, and seems positively disposed toward it. If you will be unable to attend and wish to participate in revisions of this publication, contact David at (914) 592-0614.

Another event at the section meeting will be the election of a new Vice Chair, to serve under Tom Frusciano when he becomes chair at the end of the section meeting in New Orleans. The steering committee will present a candidate at the section meeting. Also, the steering committee, which is currently composed of the past three former chairs, will be expanded to seven members by the time of the meeting. Steering committee members advise the chair on planning projects for the section, assist in soliciting news for the newsletter, and assist in selecting members for committees and working groups. If you are interested in serving on the steering committee, please contact me by July 1.

Until we meet in the Crescent City, enjoy your summer. May your days be filled with standardized descriptions, coherent indexing, and excellent finding aids.

Barbara Teague

1992-1993 Description Section Chair

NewsNotes

Princeton Library Publishes Guide To Collection of World War II Records. The vast collection of World War II materials at Princeton University are recorded in a new 113-page volume published by the university library.

Publication of "Princeton, Forward March!: A Guide to World War II Records at Princeton" marks the completion of a year-long project that successfully processed more than 600 feet of records. The author of the guide, Melissa A. Johnson, has also prepared an exhibition on the university's role in the war that is now on display at the university's Seeley G. Mudd Library.

The book describes the library's 17 major collections, for which guides were written as part of the project. Johnson also identifies an additional 105 sets of records with significant war-related materials found in the university library's Department of Rare Books and Special Collections. In addition, the guide lists more than 600 doctoral dissertations, master's theses and senior theses written by Princeton students on various aspects of the war.

One particular strength of the collection is the large assortment of private propaganda and fund-raising material aimed at promoting American entry into the war and successful prosecution after entry. Included here are materials prepared by such organizations as the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies, Fight for Freedom, United China Relief and the Council on Books in Wartime. A second area of strength is material documenting the role played by individuals in the military and economic spheres, including Bernard Baruch, Ferdinand Eberstadt and James Forrestal, as well such organizations as Rubber Development Corp.

The library also holds records of many of the key figures on the Council on Foreign Relations, which provided assistance with mobilization, political refugees, postwar plans and Anglo-American relations. Closer to home, the archives maintains considerable information on the role Princeton played in the war effort and the changes the war forced on the campus.

Supporting the project and guide were the library's John Foster and Janet Avery Dulles Fund, the New Jersey Committee for the Humanities and the New Jersey Historical Commission. Copies of the guide are being distributed free to all New Jersey colleges and many public libraries, as well as to major academic libraries throughout the country. Others may obtain copies for \$7 through the Mudd library.

The Admiral Richard Byrd Papers: Ohio State University Archives. The Ohio State University Archives is processing the papers of Admiral Richard Byrd, the noted polar explorer. These papers, consisting of approximately 700 cubic feet of material, were originally acquired by the Byrd Polar Research Center on the campus or the University. The collection consists of Byrd's personal papers, records of his expeditions, photographs, maps, navigational charts, motion picture films, phonograph records, cassettes, and artifacts. In 1990, the Byrd Center, the University Libraries, and the University Archives constituted the Byrd Polar Research Center Archival Program. In 1992, the University Archives received a grant from the U.S. Department of Education to hire a full time project Archivist, one graduate assistant, and one undergraduate. Richard Hite, who previously worked at the Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland, was hired as Project Archivist and began work in November 1992. Robert Matuozzi was hired as the graduate assistant and Katherine Gluntz joined the staff in January 1993 as undergraduate assistant. The staff is employing, with some modifications, a method of team processing devised by Hite and his former WRHS colleague, Daniel Linke and is described in an article written by Hite and Linke and published in *The Midwestern Archivist* (Fall 1990). The grant is scheduled for completion in Fall 1994.

American Heritage Center Begins Retrospective Cataloging Project. In June, 1992, the National Historical Publications and Records Commission awarded the American Heritage Center a grant of \$169,125. The grant was given for the retrospective cataloging of approximately 3,500 western history collections held by the Center. The grant provided support for the employment of two cataloger and one data entry specialist. Carol Collier, a cataloger in the University of Wyoming Libraries, and Lorelee Bloom, an archivist at the Iowa Historical Society, were recruited for the cataloger positions. William Hopkins, a recent University of Wyoming graduate, joined the project as the data entry specialist.

In addition to the staff employed as part of the grant, four other AHC staff are directly involved in the project. Thomas Wilsted, Associate Director/Operations, is the project director. Maxine Trost, Manager/Arrangement & Description, provides day-to-day supervision over the project staff. Archivists D.C. Thompson and Mark Shelstad are also involved in cataloging or in other phases of the project.

The AHC is creating full MARC-AMC records on OCLC and these are then transported to the CARL (Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries) bibliographic network. Since January, 1993, when the project began, more than 400 records have been created. In addition to the creation of cataloging records, there is a careful appraisal of each collection, and some collections have been transferred to subject files or the university library. The project should end in December 1994.

The Special Collections Department, Alderman Library, of the University of Virginia received a \$105,576 Title II-C grant from the U.S. Department of Education for the first year of a three-year project for retrospective conversion of approximately 10,800 manuscript and archival collections. Begun in October 1992, the project will add 3,000-4,000 records per year to the NOTIS OPAC in-house database and tape load them to OCLC and RLIN.

Among the collections being converted to the MARC:amc format will be 1,140 from the Clifton Waller Barrett Library of American Literature and 3,300 items from the papers and architectural drawings of Thomas Jefferson. Using existing catalog cards and finding aids, the project staff updates the current description to conform to APPM 2nd ed. guidelines. Collections without descriptions will be reprocessed by the Technical Services staff before cataloging.

Printed guides to the collections are input on the library computer, GWIS, through Internet and noted in the 555 field. By the end of 1995, every manuscript collection should be on-line. For more information, contact the Project Cataloger, Susan Hamburger, Special Collections Dept., Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA 22903 (804/994-4967), e-mail: sh4e@Virginia.edu.

NARA releases detail D.C., WWII. The National Archives announces publication of "Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital" (Inventory No. 16), compiled by Mary-Jane M. Dowd. The new inventory describes National Archives Record Group 42, which includes records from 1790 to 1933 relating to the creation, location, development and early governance of the City of Washington and the District of Columbia. Publication of the illustrated and indexed inventory was made possible through a generous grant from The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation of Washington, D.C. It is particularly appropriate that this publication should appear during the bicentennial celebration of the Nation's Capital.

The inventory will guide researchers to material that is rich in the history of the Federal City's formative years. Record Group 42 includes records of presidents Washington, Adams, Jefferson and Monroe, as well as those of later Presidents. Also in the record group are letters, reports and drawings by some of Washington's foremost urban and park planners, architects and sculptors, including Pierre L'Eniata, Benjamin Latrobe, Robert Mills and Daniel Chester French. There are drawings of and documents relating to many significant buildings, bridges, parks, statues, monuments and memorials in the national capital. The most important of these include the White House, the U.S. Capitol, the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial. Copies of the inventory may be obtained at no cost by writing the National Archives, Fulfillment Branch (NEDC), Customer Service Section, 8700 Edgeworth Drive, Capitol Heights, MD, 20743-3701. For further information about availability, call 800-788-6282.

As part of its commemoration of the 50th anniversary of World War II, the National Archives announces the release of "United States at War: 1944," a documentary teaching unit. The package contains 45 facsimile documents from the holdings of the National Archives; 10 film segments contained on three cassettes featuring excerpts from World War II-era newsreels, military films and German propaganda film; and a teacher's guide. It is the 13th in a series of teaching packages developed and written by NEEE and published and distributed by SIRS, Inc., Boca Raton, FL.

FINDING AIDS FAIR SOLICITS GUIDES FOR NEW ORLEANS

The Description Section is again sponsoring a Finding Aids Fair at this year's SAA meeting in New Orleans. All submissions, regardless of subject content, will be welcome, and special encouragement is given to our Cajun members. (Electrical outlets will not be available this year.) Bring your finding aids to the SAA meeting in New Orleans and drop them off at the Finding Aids Fair exhibit location or mail them to:

Dr. John M. Caldwell
Louisiana Tech University
PO Box 9988TS
Ruston, LA 71272

Contributors who want their samples back should mark them "To Be Returned," and pick them up before the exhibit area closes. Any questions should be directed to Barbara Teague at 502-875-7000.

Letters to the Editor

Electronic records vocabulary inadequate for Matters

To the Editor:

This is a reply to Hugh Shinn's "Electronic records pose new challenges for description," *Descriptive Notes* ([Winter 1992-93](#)):4. Shinn discusses briefly the description of electronic records, in one instance comparing it with description of paper records and concluding that the difference

... lies in the detail required for electronic records. If the same degree of detail were used to describe paper records as with electronic records, we would not only say that a series was arranged alphabetically, but we would note how many sheets of paper were in each folder and what type of information was found on each sheet.

The analogy doesn't quite hold. Electronic records, like paper records, come in different forms--not all of which can be usefully compared with individual sheets of paper filed alphabetically (by what?) in folders.

Some descriptions of some kinds of paper records *do*, in fact, note "what type of information was found on each sheet." For example (this is used in SAA's USMARC AMC workshop:

Auburn Prison.

Female inmate parole case files 1920-1960.

120 cubic feet

Arrangement: Numeric by inmate number.

Parole review form contains name, number, country, crime, sentence date eligible for parole, date maximum sentence expires. (7 categories)

Applicant statement contains: name, age, address, occupation, parole custodian, future plans. (6 categories)

This might not be considered a particularly "detailed" description for 120 cubic feet of material, but it accurately conveys the *type* of information in each file in the series. If this file were automated, the type of information, the individual categories of information (the "variables"), *and* the description might not be very different. In these cases, enumerating the variables in large part describes the records.

But neither all electronic records nor all paper records are usefully described by means of the "variables" to which Shinn also refers.

What if we were describing a series of *letters*? We would be likely only to be able to characterize them generally as relating to the personal or organizational enterprise or activity that generated the series. For example: (also from USMARC AMC workshop)

Stanford University. School of Law.

Dean's office records, 1906-1914.

1 linear ft.

Six letter books containing general correspondence from the Dean's Office on such subjects as student recommendations, questions about entrance requirements, exams and course credit, the Law Library and budgetary information. Most of the letters are signed by Frederick C. Woodward, Acting Dean and recipients include David Starr Jordan and John Casper Branner.

If today's dean's office correspondence had been created and maintained as electronic documents, would we characterize the *content* of the correspondence documents any differently--just because they are maintained electronically? I think not.

The "variables" in the case of letter documents might be *date sent, return address, "to" address, file reference, salutation, body text, complimentary close, signature, copies note, enclosures note, post script*, etc.

These variables do describe the type of information found on each letter document. We don't usually use them to describe letter files because the concept of *letter* as a form of material is assumed to be universally understood in our culture. I would also note that describing their *content* is almost exactly equivalent to describing the functions and responsibilities of the dean's office and then confirming that the correspondence does, in fact, relate to and document those functions and responsibilities.

The point I am trying to make, finally, is that the term *electronic records* is insufficient to define any meaningful intellectual type or form of record. To make appropriate comparisons between the description of records maintained on paper, we should first define the type or form of record in each case to make sure they are actually comparable.

Sincerely
Marion Matters

Editor's Reply: Ms. Matters final point is well-taken, and I would like to offer a mea culpa concerning the questioned analogy. It was inserted by me, not Mr. Shinn, in an attempt to illuminate the level of technical detail required to access electronic information and may not be an exact fit. Also, the electronic records Mr. Shinn has worked with have been, primarily, large "flat" data sets and that should have been clearly stated.

It is interesting that Matters chose prison records as an example because Shinn worked on a more contemporary set of NY State prison inmate records held on magnetic tape. To allow potential users to access the information, Shinn produced a 90-page guide detailing how the information was arranged what variables were missing, and included a detailed list of variables and their column lengths. Perhaps this level of detail more closely resembles a folder list (and may not be considered by some to be part of archival description), but many records in electronic form require this level of detail for meaningful access. For this particular data set, appendices were needed to explain the codes found throughout the data. Some of this information was gleaned from extant documentation, but much was gained by "sifting" through the database.

If the Auburn prison example Matters cites were in electronic form, additional information needed to access it would include record size specifications; variable names and lengths, and possibly variable types for fixed format files. In other words, if we were to amplify on the original analogy, we would say that not only would we need to know the contents of each sheet, but also its precise location on the sheet. (For example, an inmate's age might be located 17 lines from the top of the page and 57 characters from the left margin.)

The dean's letters, while requiring substantially less information than a flat data file, would still require more information in electronic form. (Would they be in ASCII, EBCDIC, or some proprietary format? What medium are they stored on and to what specifications?)

However, the varying technical requirements for these two types of electronic records only returns us to Matter's assertion that the phrase "electronic records" may be no more informative for description purposes than "paper records"--maybe even less so. Unfortunately, the task of developing standards and a vocabulary needed to make electronic records description uniform has not evolved as far as that for paper records. But the archival resources and information needed to preserve and make accessible "electronic records," whether expanded under the rubric of description, preservation, access, or "electronic records lifesaver," are different from those needed to do the same for paper records. This was the point I attempted to make by inserting the analogy.

Letters continued...

Task force to review NUCMC's usefulness

The following letter was sent to SAA Description Section chairperson, Barbara Teague, after archivists around the country raised their voices against the proposed abolishment of NUCMC. As you will read, NUCMC's future remains uncertain.

Dear Ms. Teague:

When the Library began NUCMC in 1959 the product it offered was a unique and valuable service. A centralized

register of manuscript collections, NUCMC has been a conduit for libraries and archives, many of them small, to provide information about their manuscript collections to a broad audience. NUCMC has been a useful tool, and its elimination would entail some loss for scholars, small libraries and archives not connected to major utilities like RLIN and OCLC.

Nevertheless, the development of the "Archives and Manuscript" format has stimulated the creation by more and more libraries of more and more records in RLIN and OCLC, generating duplication and leading to decisions on the part of some repositories to cease adding holdings to NUCMC to avoid costly duplication. The changing environment for archives and manuscript libraries, coupled with the urgent and enduring requirement for the Library to use its limited funds effectively, compels us to evaluate this activity as part of our general examination of all current programs, just as other libraries are doing.

The facts are that the seven-person NUCMC staff costs about \$360,000 and the program deals solely with information about other libraries' collections. Thus we need to evaluate the cost-effectiveness and usefulness of this activity and its priority for the Library of Congress. To help with this review we will convene this spring a small task group composed of knowledgeable Library and non-Library staff to make recommendations about the future of NUCMC--to retain it as is, to reduce its scope and cost, to find alternative funding, or eliminate it as a Library of Congress program. I encourage NUCMC users and contributors who have specific suggestions for making this product both less costly and more useful to contact Sarah Thomas, Director for Cataloging (202-707-5333).

We will keep you and other members of the archival and library community informed about any changes we decide to make after assessing the NUCMC task group's report. We appreciate your interest in NUCMC.

Sincerely,
Winston Tabb
Associate Librarian for Collections Services
The Library of Congress

Inquiries, Questions, and Requests

This section of the newsletter is a public service to our readers who seek information on description issues. You may reply directly to the addresses of the individuals listed.

Dwayne Cox of **Auburn University** would like to receive estimates on the unit cost to tag an AMC record and enter it into OCLC, RLIN, or another bibliographic database. He is NOT interested in the cost of processing the records or preparing a detailed finding aid. While he understands costs vary, he wants an estimate for a grant he is writing. If you can help, please send information to Dwayne Cox, University Archives, Auburn University, Auburn, AL, 36849, 205-844-1708, or FAX 205-844-1753.

Call for Stuff and Nonsense. Vicki Weiss of the New York State Archives and Records Administration would like to put together a strange-but-true list of collections available at historical documents repositories. For example, the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society has a collection of documents generated by the Niagara Frontier Hoo-Hoos, a branch of an international organization, the members of which attended gatherings known as caterwauls. If you have arranged and/or described a collection which brought a smile to your face or forced you to jump out of your chair in a quest for someone with whom you could share your find, please send a copy of the biographical historical note, the scope and content note and whatever other information you deem essential to understanding the individual or organization to Vicki's attention, 9B38 Cultural Education Center, Albany, NY 12230. Please spread the word about this search. When she's amassed a few, she'll share the information.

The Canadian Perspective

RAD idea: Complete description rules in one volume

by Kent Haworth

Some American archivists may be familiar with Rules for Archival Description, or RAD as it is known affectionately by Canadian Archivists. The development of RAD is the responsibility of the Planning Committee on Descriptive Standards (PCDS), a committee of the Bureau of Canadian Archivists representing professional archivists in Canada. Funding for this project is provided by the Canadian Council of Archives, representing Canadian archival institutions.

The PCDS expects to complete its work by 1995. RAD is based on the archival principle of respect des fonds and its structure follows the ISBD (G). Accordingly, RAD provides in one volume rules for the description of all materials comprising a fonds d'archives and rules for the provision of access points to those descriptions. The general rules, rules for textual records and graphic materials, and rules for the choice and form of name headings have been published. Rules for the description of sound recordings, cartographic materials, and electronic records are presently being drafted by working groups. Work on rules for the description of architectural drawings and moving image records will commence this fall. Draft rules go through an extensive review process by the archival community which accounts in part for the time it has taken to complete the first edition of RAD.

Rules for the description of electronic records forming part of a fonds present particular challenges for the working group responsible for drafting them. To our knowledge no comparable work has been undertaken and in this respect they are engaged in a truly pioneering endeavor. We encourage American Archivists, indeed archivists everywhere, who are interested in reviewing the draft rules for electronic records, or any of the other remaining media chapters for that matter, to provide us with their comments. Copies of RAD in either French or English are available at a cost of \$10.00 Canadian from the Bureau of Canadian Archivists, PO Box 2596, Station D, Ottawa, ON, K1P 5W6. Purchasing RAD will place you on a mailing list to receive subsequent chapters of RAD as they are published at no additional cost.

Kent Haworth is Chairman of the Planning Committee on Descriptive Standards, a committee of the Bureau of Canadian Archivists.

Archival Frontiers

Joint research project to focus on authority information

A team of four archivists will focus on the issue of enhanced authority information for archives this summer as part of the Research Fellowship Program for Study of Modern Archives at the Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. The team consists of: James Bower (Getty Art History Information Program), Marion Matters (Consulting Archivist), Kathleen Roe (New York State Archives and Records Administration), and Richard Szary (Yale University). The team will first assess existing archival and library literature on authority control, gather data on authority information uses and needs from a range of interested groups, and then will assess existing potential sources of authority data. The goals of the project are to:

- define and explain archival authority control for review by the profession;
- explain how archival authority information may be used by archivists, librarians, and researchers/users;
- identify common elements of information in archival authority information;
- recommend further practical steps that archivists can take to develop and use authority information.

A preliminary report of the results of the project will be presented to the Committee on Archival Information Exchange during its meeting at the SAA Annual Conference in New Orleans. Further updates will be provided in the Description Section Newsletter.

This section, *Archival frontiers*, is devoted to the discussion and dissemination of information about archival topics relating to new types of description activities. Submissions are highly encouraged and welcome.

Descriptive Notes is produced twice yearly, summer and winter. All submissions pertaining to archival description activities will be considered for publication. Editing for length may occur. Send your submissions to:

Descriptive Notes

c/o Dan Linke

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This issue was assembled with substantial keyboard assistance from Lynn Rossini.

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