

Descriptive Notes

The Newsletter of the Description Section of the Society of American Archivists Winter 1994-95

NewsNotes

Keeping busy with cataloging, manuals, and guides

Lehigh County Historical Society, which houses 30,000 museum objects and 100,000 library books spread over ten museums, a historical society and a library, recently began the arduous process of converting paper records to an online database. Collections Manager Sara Kelley systematized the process, hiring local volunteers, divvying tasks, and providing tutorials on computer basics and on Minaret, a collections management software package. Kelley developed two custom screens for the data entry work, one based on the catalog cards for the library holdings, the other on the accession records and printed inventories of the museum objects. When the conversion is complete, researchers will have improved access, and individuals will be able to conduct their own genealogical research.

You'll be holding all the aces if you get the new SAA Standards Manual!

Standards for Archival Description: A Handbook, compiled by Victoria Irons Walch for the Working Group on Standards for Archival Description, was published by the Society of American Archivists in February 1994. The publication is designed to introduce archivists to existing standards and the organizations that developed them. It is also a useful reference for those generally familiar with the standards but in need of assistance in tracing sources and interconnections among available standards and their specific applications. Some 85 standards are featured with an additional 185 more briefly cited in listings at the end of each chapter. These include standards for information systems, data exchange, cataloging, finding aids, authority control, editing and publishing, and statistics. *Standards for Archival Description: A Handbook* is \$25 for SAA members, \$30 for others, plus \$6 shipping/handling. Prepayment required. Visa and Mastercard welcome. Contact SAA, 600 S. Federal, Suite 504, Chicago, IL 60605 or call their publications department at (312) 922-0140, ext. 21.

A new finding guide to the collections of the **United Methodist Church** is now available. The Preliminary Guide to the Collections of The General Commission on Archives and History of the United Methodist Church contains descriptive notes on records of church agencies and independent institutions and personal papers. Compiled by the staff of the General Commission and edited by Dr. L. Dale Patterson, the Preliminary Guide is the first complete listing of the holdings available at the United Methodist Archives.

The first section of the guide contains thirty entries related to the general agencies of the United Methodist Church. Agency records have been organized into large groups and include General Conference, Episcopacy, Education, Missions, Discipleship, Pension and Finance, and Communications. Some of the material in these sections include the Records of the Council of Bishops (1896-1969); Records from the Board of Missions of the Methodist Church (1912-1969); and Records from the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits (1891-1965).

Independent institutions which have donated their material to the Commission comprise the second section of the guide. Records from such organizations as Church Women United, the Bishops' Spouses Association, and the Methodist Deaconess Association have been included. The largest section of the Preliminary Guide contains over two hundred citations to manuscripts and personal papers. Material from bishops, missionaries, lay people, and other leaders in the church are found. Each entry in the guide contains information on the inclusive dates of the material, the size of the collection, an administrative history or biographical note, a scope and content note, and information on related collections and/or individuals. In addition, there is an index. The Preliminary Guide can be obtained by contacting the United Methodist Archives, P.O. Box 127, Madison, NJ 07940. [Phone: (201) 408-3189].

In 1992 the **American Heritage Center** received a two-year grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission to conduct a retrospective cataloging project of the AHC's western history collections. The three staff members hired with grant funds and two permanent staff members have produced online catalog records using the amc format. These records have been entered into the OCLC and CARL (Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries) bibliographic databases.

Over 1,400 records have been created since cataloging began in January 1993. The records can be examined by anyone with access to OCLC or CARL databases. The grant, as it continues into 1995, will provide access to collections related to geology and mining, screen writing, journalism, the petroleum industry, the popular arts and other subjects in addition to western history.

The project has also had a number of other benefits. In conjunction with the AHC's symposium "Women in Public Life," which commemorated 125 years of women's suffrage in Wyoming in September 1994, a Guide to Women's History Resources was completed using the entries written by catalogers for the scope and content note, 520, and the history or biography, 545, cataloging fields. These two fields had already been saved in WordPerfect files for new abstracts to the collections. The Guide to Women's History Resources was produced using WordPerfect's keyword searching and indexing capabilities which persuaded the AHC Board of Associates to funding five other guides: popular arts, politics and world affairs, conservation and natural resources, Wyoming and western history and mining and geology.

While online access to materials seemingly makes printed subject guide obsolete, AHC staff have found that donors, students and the public will thumb through a guide instead of looking up the materials through the catalog records; in addition, not everyone has computer access to the bibliographic records, particularly donors and inexperienced researchers. Staff point out that since the guides were derived from the catalog record and the entries in the guide are, with only small editorial changes, the same as those in the catalog record; they can be used as an opportunity to educate and inform about computerized access to our collections.

The project has also appraised over 7,000 collections in the course of cataloging and identified those collections which require additional work prior to cataloging. This information has been entered into a database which will allow access to collections that need further attention from AHC staff.

Copies of the Guide to Women's History Resources can be purchased for \$3 from the American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, P.O. Box 3924, Laramie, WY 82071.

From the Chair

Where do we go from here?

As a member of the Description Section I have always been impressed with the work of the Section and the information it provides to SAA about descriptive issues of concern to archivists. The recent meeting in Indianapolis and the newsletter amply demonstrate this role of the Section. As the chair for this year, I would like to see the Descriptive Section take a more active role in the field, in addition to its existing role.

It is at this point I would like to ask for feedback from members of the Section as where they think the Section should take a proactive stance. For example, one suggestion I have received involves the question of description, within the context of Gophers, World Wide Webs, MARC records etc. Does the previous dichotomy between collection descriptions and "cataloging" still exist; has it changed and, if so, how? The display of the work by Dan Pitti at Indianapolis should make people aware of these issues. If this and/or some other topic is an area for the Section to pursue, what would be the most effective ways for this to be done, both at the annual meeting, as well as an ongoing objective.

At this time I would like to ask members to think about a session at the 1996 Annual Meeting which would be sponsored by the Section. Now is not too early to start working on a session for '96', and we need your input to

develop the type of session that best meets members needs.

What is needed is a response from members as to issues they would like to see pursued. I look forward to hearing from you, through whatever medium you wish to contact me.

Fred Hohnhart

1994-1995 Description Section Chair

University Archives

Michigan State University

EG-13 Library Building

E. Lansing, MI 48824

517-432-1466 or e-mail 20669MMA@MSU.EDU

Archival Frontiers

Bringing archivists closer to the people's provenance

WORKING WITH FOLK MATERIALS IN NEW YORK STATE: A Manual for Folklorists and Archivists

Edited by John Suter, with contributions by Bruce Buckley, David Carmichael, James Corsaro, Ellen MacHale, Susan O'Brien, Kathleen Roe, and Frederick J. Stielow

New York Folklore Society, 1994, 200+ pages, \$25.00 Released October 19, 1994

During the past 50 years or so, folklorists and others concerned with folklore and traditional arts in rural and ethnic urban communities throughout New York State have been bringing to light an enormous range of cultural expressions that have been little known outside the communities -- sometimes even the families -- where they were created. Recording stories and songs, documenting family and community events, objects of beauty and use, and writing about their observations, they have been creating a unique and priceless documentary heritage of people's living traditions. Much of the documentation has been done in preparation for public projects -- museum exhibitions, festivals, recordings, and publications. But once a project is over, the documentary materials often end up in a file drawer, inaccessible and deteriorating.

The New York Folklore Society's Folk Archives Project is bringing folklorists and archivists together to address this problem. The goal is to make sure that valuable cultural documentation finds its way into secure and accessible archives for the benefit both of future researchers and of the communities whose traditions are recorded. The manual is an important step in this process.

Working with Folk Materials in New York State is designed to:

- introduce folklorists and archivists to each others' purposes, methods, and concerns;
- make the folklorist's work of collecting and documenting folk culture easier and more productive;
- encourage documentary practices and archival treatment that will facilitate the care of folklore materials in secure and accessible archives

Produced in an attractive looseleaf binder, the manual includes the following chapters:

- Introduction
- Fundamentals of Folklore
- Fundamentals of Archives
- When Folklorists and Archivists Meet - Clarifying terms and concepts that may lead to confusion
- What To Do Now - Learning more about each other, and managing folklore materials

- Forms and Guidelines - Folklore data sheets with guidelines, sample contracts and release forms
- Glossary of terms in folklore and archives
- Resources - Organizational resources and bibliography for folklore and archives
- Supplementary Readings on various topics

Readers can add their own materials to the binder, and the NYFS will periodically ship additions and changes to customers.

The New York Folklore Society, founded in 1944 and located in Ithaca, New York, is a non-profit organization dedicated to furthering cultural equity and cross-cultural understanding through its programs and publications serving the field of folk arts and folklife in New York State. The NYFS works with folk artists, folklorists and other interested people to nurture folk arts and folklife within communities where they originate and to foster the sharing of folk traditions across cultural boundaries. The Society publishes the Scholarly journal *New York Folklore* and the *New York Folklore Newsletter*, offers technical assistance, and produces performances, conferences, forums, and other programs with statewide scope, such as the Folk Archives Project, that address issues concerning folk arts and folklife.

Working with Folk Materials in New York State: A Manual for Folklorists and Archivists is available from the NYFS for \$20 (members), \$25 (non-members), plus \$3 shipping and handling. Contact the New York Folklore Society at P.O. Box 130, Newfield, NY 14867, (607) 273-9137 voice and fax.

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
Seeley Mudd Manuscript Library
65 Olden Street
Princeton, NJ 08544
Fax: 609-258-3385 E-Mail: LINKE@PUCC

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