

Descriptive Notes

The Newsletter of the Description Section of the Society of American Archivists Winter 1996-1997

NewsNotes

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The Benson Latin American Collection at The University of Texas at Austin is pleased to report the successful completion of a two-year project funded by a Title II-C grant from the Department of Education. The grant enabled the preservation rehousing and cataloging of 114 collections of archival material documenting a range of Mexican historical, political, artistic, literary, and scholarly activities from the sixteenth century to the twentieth.

The materials processed during the project include former holdings of such notable Mexican scholars of Genaro García and Joaquín García Icazbalceta. The primary subjects represented in the collections are the history and governance of Mexico, including colonial administration, native inhabitants, the Catholic Church, and military and political movements and figures. Materials also relate to Texas and other parts of North America formerly held by Spain and Mexico.

The collections comprise 380 linear feet of manuscripts and imprints; circa 73,000 photographs, negatives, transparencies, and lantern slides; and 1,220 reels of microfilm, as well as copybooks, ledgers, drawings, maps, blueprints, and a few sound recordings and artifacts. MARC records were created for all collections and appear in OCLC and UT Austin's online catalog, UTCAT, as well as in the National Information Service Corporation's CD-ROM product, Latin American Studies. Finding aids for many of the collections are linked to the Benson's home page at <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/Libs/Benson/benson.html>.

CAIE and SGML

At the 1995 SAA meeting, SAA's Committee on Archival Information Exchange created a working group on EAD (Encoded Archival Description), the SGML document type definition for archival finding aids. The Working Group is responsible for reviewing EAD documentation, including the DTD, the tag library, and application guidelines, for gathering comments and requests for changes to the DTD, and for preparing EAD for the SAA standards process. The EAD Working Group's charge has been renewed for the coming year, and it welcomes questions and comments about EAD from the archival community. Working Group members will monitor discussion on the official EAD listserv (ead@loc.gov) also. Members of the Working Group are: Kris Kiesling, chair (University of Texas at Austin), Randall Barry (Network Development/MARC Standards Office, Library of Congress), Jackie Dooley (University of California, Irvine), Ricky Erway (Research Libraries Group), Michael Fox (Minnesota Historical Society), Anne Gilliland-Swetland (University of California at Los Angeles), Steven Hensen (Duke University), Eric Miller (OCLC), Chris Petter (University of Victoria, BC), Daniel Pitti (University of California, Berkeley), Janice Ruth (Manuscript Division, LC), Richard Szary (Yale University), Rob Spindler (Arizona State University), Sharon Thibodeau (NARA), and Helena Zinkham (Prints and Photographs, LC).

Editor's Note: The address for up-to-the-moment information on SGML can be found at the SGML website: <http://www.ncsa.uiuc.edu/SDG/IT94/Proceedings?Autools/sperberg-mcqueen/sperberg.html>

Folklife in Florida

The Arrangement and Description Unit staff at the Florida State Archives have been carrying out a major description project since January of this year. The Archives acquired a significant collection of folklife documentation from the former Florida Folklife Archive, part of the Bureau of Florida Folklife Programs (BFF) which was dissolved at the end of 1995. The Florida Folklife Archive was originally established in 1976 and maintained by the BFF as a depository for field notes and research findings of the folklife program and for the folklife collections of other researchers.

Transferred to the State Archives in December 1995, the materials consist of about 250 cubic feet of administrative, program, research, and project files documenting folk arts, crafts, customs, lore, and performances throughout the state of Florida. The records include hundreds of motion picture and video items, thousands of sound recording, and tens of thousands of photographic images. Many of Florida's most important folklife personalities are represented, including Zora Neale Hurston; Thelma Boltin, the "Queen of Florida Folklife" (a.k.a. "Cousin Thelma"); Stetson Kennedy, who coordinated the Florida WPA Federal Writer's Project; and singer and storyteller Gambel Rogers, the "Florida Troubadour."

Before processing began, staff surveyed the entire collection and identified existing series. In some cases, series were broken out from larger portions of the collection; in other cases, parts of series had been scattered and needed to be brought back together.

Once series were identified, staff determined processing and description priorities based on significance and level of use. First on the agenda was a series of over 3,700 audio recordings of performances by or interviews with folk musicians, craftspeople, storytellers, and folklife interpreters. Most of these recordings document Florida Folk Festival performances by national and local folk personalities from 1954 and 1995. Other recordings document interviews with cultural tradition-bearers conducted during fieldwork of the Florida Folklife Program from 1976 to 1995. There are also a number of reproductions of Works Progress Administration (WPA) folklore field recordings from the 1930s and early 1940s.

Another processing priority was a series of approximately 50,000 photographic prints, negatives, and slides, both black-and-white and color, depicting folklife festivals and events such as the annual Florida Folk Festival; artisans and crafters such as quilters, carvers, and weavers, and their work; performances by folk dancers and musicians; educational and cultural programs sponsored by the BFF; various ethnic groups and their art, including Seminoles, Minorcans, and Greeks; persons employed in traditional Florida industries such as shrimping and turpentine; and Florida architecture.

Next to be addressed was a series of about 380 videotapes and motion picture films. Many of these document Florida Folk Festival performances and Activities. Others document other Florida celebrations and events, and some are folklife documentaries produced by the BFF and aired on public television.

Also a high priority for description were several series of tape and photo logs and indexes identifying many thousands of individual recordings and images. Description of these series enabled staff to access individual items in the mostly highly used series.

With these priority series under control, staff began work on numerous series of folklife program and project files and BFF administrative files. The program and project files include field notes, working papers, audio cassettes, and photographs and slides documenting folklife programs, projects, and activities such as folk arts apprenticeships, Florida Folk Festival field work and events, Folk Heritage Awards, Folk Arts in Education activities, and regional folklife surveys. Many of these files contain materials collected by the BFF to document some of Florida's many ethnic communities including Arab, Creek, Cuban, Czech, Finnish, Greek, Jewish, Haitian, Miccosukee, Minorcan, Seminole, Spanish, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese. Descriptive work on these records continues as it does for BFF administrative files.

For more information on the Florida Folklife Collection at the Florida State Archives, contact:

Florida State Archives
R.A. Gary Building
500 South Bronough Street

Tallahassee, FL 32399-0250
Telephone: (904) 487-2073

The Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at The University of Texas at Austin has completed a 2-year project to catalog the papers of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. Funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the project's goals included the arrangement and description of the collection, as well as the dissemination of a finding aid. The project staff, which consisted of Project Archivist Jennifer Peters, and assistants Mandy York, Michele Shukers, and Erika Heinen, successfully met these goals in September 1996.

The Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. Records, which comprise 635.8 linear feet, contain the firm's editorial and promotional files, and are complemented by personal files of the firm's founders, Alfred A. and Blanche Wolf Knopf. The presence of author correspondence, internal memoranda, editors' files, and publicity folders allow a researcher to follow the creation of a book from its original submission to its final publication. Significant writers represented in the collection include Jorge Amado, James M. Cain, Albert Camus, Willa Cather, John Hershey, Thomas Mann, H.L. Mencken, Yukio Michima, Angela Thirkell, and John Updike, among many others.

Over 1500 document boxes, plus artwork, oversize documents, galley files, slides, photographs, video, and realia comprise the collection. A 1499-page finding aid, highlighted by an index of over 53,000 correspondents, is available for scholars in the Ransom Center's Reading Room. The finding aid is also available on diskettes, and will soon be (<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/Libs/HRC/HRHRC/>). The finding aid has been provided to the National Inventory of Documentary Sources (NIDS) for inclusion. Catalog records in RLIN, and in UT Austin's local online catalog (UTCAT), also describe the collection.

History Computerization Project

The History Computerization Project of the Regional History Center of the University of Southern California and the Los Angeles Historical Society, in cooperation with the Conference of California Historical Societies, has built a history information network for the exchange of information between historians, librarians, archivists, museum curators, preservation groups, and historical societies. If you visit its homepage (www.history.la.ca.us/history), you will have links to databases, historical photographs, and links to other cultural institutions' home pages--including the Library of Congress, the Singapore Museum, or the Louvre.

From the Chair

Looking back and forward; what should we do?

While browsing through back issues of *Descriptive Notes*, I noticed that it seems to be a tradition of new Section chairs to plead for feedback from the Section membership. Let me continue that tradition.

In 1994, the SAA Task Force on Sections and Roundtables reported that "SAA members have high expectations for the work of the Sections and Roundtables," and yet the past several chairs of the Description Section have commented that this Section has been rather dormant in recent years. When you joined this Section, what did you expect from it? Have your expectations changed? Why do you continue to belong? If you belong to several sections, and are paying extra to belong to the Description Section, do you feel that you are getting your money's worth? Is it sufficient to receive a newsletter twice a year, and to attend a 2-hour meeting at the Annual Conference? If a Section is supposed to focus attention on issues of interest to its membership, what is the best way to identify those "issues of interest," and what should the Section do about those issues?

The format of the Section's meeting at the SAA Annual Conference has changed in the past few years. Up to 1994, the meeting consisted of a series of reports from representatives from the Committee on Archival Information Exchange

(CAIE), the SAA Standards Board, NUCMC, the ALA MARC Advisory Committee, and so on. In 1995 and 1996, the meeting focussed on longer presentations about one or two projects, and provided time for discussion. What is your reaction to this change? Is there too much overlap between what you hear in a Section meeting and the information you get from other sources? Are there gaps in the information you have access to? What would you like to hear about in next year's Section meeting?

For those of you who remember the Finding Aids Fair at the Annual Conference, did you find it useful? Has its value disappeared now that so many of us can find examples of archival description on the Web?

Please take some time to consider these questions (or any other comments you have about the Section) and respond to me by e-mail, telephone, fax, or paper mail (see below).

Thank you: On a final note, Dan Linke helped resurrect this newsletter in 1992, and has been responsible for it ever since. This is his last issue, though, so I would like to thank him on your behalf for his work in keeping the Section informed, amused, and connected over the past 5 years. Welcome to the new editor, Ann Hodges, and good luck to her!

Heather Heywood

1996-1997 Description Section Chair

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What's in store for Descriptive Notes?

by Ann Hodges

Incoming Descriptive Notes Editor

I have been given this opportunity to present my thoughts about the direction this newsletter will take when I assume editorship. I would like to stress at the outset that I welcome comments and ideas from the section membership.

In addition to reporting on section business and activities, I believe the newsletter should provide information about developments affecting our field and about the activities in which our colleagues are engaged. As an example, I think the newsletter should publish updates on developments concerning EAD; in fact, I have already received suggestions that it do so. Additionally, I would like for the newsletter to include brief reports from institutions which have begun to use EAD. Information about the process of implementation, including any problems encountered and solutions found, would be of value to others embarking upon or considering the use of EAD.

The newsletter should continue to announce and report on grant projects undertaken by members. Relatively few have been publicized here, and I would encourage recipients of grants to view the newsletter as a forum for sharing information about their projects. I hope that section members also will contribute reports of pilot projects, innovative accomplishments, and any other activities which they believe might be of interest to the rest of us. Information on approaches taken to descriptive challenges would be useful to others facing similar undertakings.

I would like to announce in the newsletter the promotions, retirements, and other job changes of section members. While certain accomplishments and activities of SAA members receive notice in *Archival Outlook*, comparatively few announcements of job changes appear there. I feel that using the newsletter to report relocations of colleagues would facilitate contact with them and improve our awareness of developments in other institutions.

Fulfillment of these expectations for the newsletter depends on the contribution of information and reports by section

members. I hope to produce two issues per year, and encourage you to help make that possible by contacting me with submissions. I welcome your ideas and suggestions. I can be reached by the various methods listed below.

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Cataloger, Archives and Manuscript Collections and Maps

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A few reflections before moving on

by Outgoing Descriptive Notes Editor, Dan Linke

It was over five years ago that Kathleen Roe, then chair of the Description Section and my boss at the New York State Archives, asked me to be this newsletter's editor. Well, "ask" isn't the right word. Anyone who knows Kathleen understands that she can be charmingly persuasive, and if that fails, she can be just plain persuasive. Reassured by her that I could do the work, she also supplied me with the names of half a dozen people who were doing interesting description work. I called them, and from those conversations the first issue of Descriptive Notes in five years was produced.

Since becoming editor, I have changed jobs twice, moved, bought a house, and found myself increasingly busy. This fall, I started doctoral courses at Rutgers with an eye toward completing the degree before the end of the millenium (which I measure as 2001 A.D., not 2000 A.D.!). While it is fun editing the newsletter, it is work finding articles to publish, though this should not be so. At every archival conference I meet people who do not realize that their work is intrinsically interesting to the greater archival community. I hope my successor Ann Hodges has more luck convincing these bashful archivists to contribute.

One thought about the Section: every chairperson during my tenure solicits the section for ideas, feedback, etc., yet given our size (over 300 members), little work occurs; certainly less so than other sections. Part of the problem is the section's structure, I think, and perhaps we should consider making the chair a two-year position in order for there to be some continuity of leadership, as well as some time to take on specific projects. This might require changing the section's constitution, though I do not think anyone would argue that the current structure has produced fantastic results.

Yet at the same time, the section has done well; attendance at SAA meetings has been growing, and the change to focused project reports has produced good discussions in the last two years. I plan to continue to be part of the section and wish it, and Ann Hodges, well. Thanks to all of you who have contributed or helped me in some way during my tenure. Also thanks to all of you for allowing me to indulge my whimsy with the limited graphics set I had at my disposal. For the curious, I have been working primarily with WordPerfect's "Leisure Pack," which subdivides its graphics into four categories: Food, Music/Art, Recreation, and Sports. Nothing resembling a Hollinger box to be found in that crowd! From now on, however, I look forward to reading Descriptive Notes.

| [Previous issue](#) | [Next issue](#) | [Return to Section Newsletter page](#) |