Descriptive Notes

From the Chair

Description Section Meeting - Saturday 30 August 1997

I hope you're planning to attend the SAA Annual Meeting in Chicago this year and, of course, the Description Section Meeting. We are scheduled to meet on Saturday 30 August 1997 from 8:00 - 10:00 am. We will have a working meeting this year, including:

- reports from CAIE (the Committee on Archival Information Exchange), MARBI (US MARC   Advisory Board - ALA), CC:DA (ALA Committee on Cataloguing: Description & Access), and other SAA committees and boards
- brainstorming of program proposals for the 1998 Annual Meeting
- discussion about the future of the Description Section
- Finding Aids Fair - do we want to revive this?
- election of the Vice Chair/Chair-Elect

The Description Section Needs You!

The Section is seeking nominees for the position of Vice Chair/Chair-Elect. Here is your opportunity to become involved in the Section and SAA. The Vice Chair will assist the Chair in planning and implementing the Section's program and will become the Chair the following year. If you are interested, or just have questions, please contact the current Chair. The election for Vice Chair will be held at the Section's meeting during the SAA Annual Meeting in Chicago.

1998 Program Proposals

In the last issue of Descriptive Notes, I asked for feedback from Section members about what the Section should be doing. Several people wrote to suggest that we get involved in submitting program proposals for the SAA Annual Meeting. This is a function that many sections and roundtables perform, and there are many advantages to brainstorming session proposals during a section meeting. Description is an important part of archival work and there are probably many of us who would like to hear a discussion of particular issues, a report on a new descriptive initiative somewhere, or a session on some burning description topic. We can pool these ideas at the Section meeting, gather suggestions for possible speakers, get some volunteers to write up the proposals, and finally, submit the proposals to the Program Committee with the support of the Section. If appropriate, the Chair of the Section can request support from other Sections that may be jointly interested in a particular proposal. In general, program proposals which are supported by one or more sections have a better chance of being taken seriously by the Program Committee. So, please bring your ideas to our meeting in Chicago!

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News Notes

Electronic Access Project underway at NARA

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) has launched the Electronic Access Project in an effort to describe its holdings nationwide. The project, still in the developmental phase, will eventually result in a virtual card catalog of all NARA holdings nationwide, including those in the Presidential libraries and regional archives. In addition, copies of NARA's most popular and significant manuscripts, photographs, sound recordings, maps, drawings and other documents will be digitized and available for researchers to view online. Users will be able to search the descriptions in the system by title, subject, date, or other keywords.

Until development of the catalog is completed, NARA will continue to provide access to its prototype system, the NARA Archival Information Locator (www.nara.gov/nara/nail.html). NAIL is an online-searchable database that contains information about a wide variety of NARA's holdings across the country. Although the locator contains more than 250,000 descriptions and links to digital copies of 3500 documents, it represents only a limited portion of NARA's vast holdings. NARA will continue to add descriptions and digital documents to the prototype until the catalog is completed and made available online.

NARA has provided an overview of the project at www.nara.gov/nara/vision/eapover.html. For further information, please contact Lynn Bellardo, project manager, at (301) 713-6730.

Lydia J. E. Reid

CHI Receives Grant

Thanks to a generous grant from an anonymous donor, Concordia Historical Institute has hired a project archivist to undertake the task of cataloging its backlog of materials. The approximately 1,500 collections include archival records of the church as well as personal papers. Only about 200 of the collections had been cataloged prior to the addition to the Institute staff of Kristina Gray Perez, of Columbia, Mo., in early April of 1997. She has already completed the arrangement and description of the official papers of Dr. John Behnken, one of the presidents of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod.

The grant, in addition to supporting the work of Mrs. Perez for three years, covers the cost of assistance from seminary students and the purchase of a CD-R (Recordable) drive. Coupled with a scanner, this technology will permit CHI to place thousands of visual images and historic documents in CD-ROM format. The Institute also plans to put finding aids for the collections online as they are completed.

Marvin A. Huggins

Eddie Rickenbacker Papers

Auburn University Archives recently completed the arrangement and description of its Eddie Rickenbacker collection. At a volume of slightly over twenty-five cubic feet, it is an important companion to the Rickenbacker collections at the Library of Congress and the United States Air Force Museum and to Ohio State University's fourteen typescript volumes of his speeches, statements, and memoirs.

Rickenbacker was America's "Ace of Aces" in the First World War. He led the 94th Aero Pursuit Squadron, also known as the "Hat-In-The-Ring" squadron, with 26 confirmed victories against German pilots in fighting over the trenches of northern France. His air combat heroics earned him two Croix de Guerre, a Distinguished Service Cross

with Oak Leaf Clusters, and a belated Congressional Medal of Honor. Rickenbacker also enjoyed fame as a race car driver and as the owner of both the Indianapolis Speedway (1927-1946) and Eastern Air Lines (1938-1964). Although he was severely injured in an airplane crash in 1941, Rickenbacker conducted secret inspections of American air bases for General "Hap" Arnold. He and his crew were lost in the South Pacific in late 1942 while on one such mission. Rescued because his wife insisted that the military continue their search efforts, Rickenbacker returned to civilian life to build Eastern Air Lines. Retiring in 1964, Captain Eddie toured the country to support conservative political causes.

The papers contain hundreds of photographs, much of RickenbackerÕs correspondence, drafts of speeches he delivered, reports and memoirs he wrote, and a dozen Space Museum of the Smithsonian Institute donated twenty-six scrapbooks of newspaper clippings covering his life from 1913 through 1973 in exchange for microfilmed copies. While the vast majority of the materials concern Eddie Rickenbacker, the collection also documents the lives of his wife, Adelaide Frost Rickenbacker, and their two adopted sons, David and William.

The Rickenbacker papers complement the array of aeronautical history and engineering materials in AuburnÕs Ralph Broun Draughon Library. The collection is cataloged in OCLC, and a digitized display and biography will be available soon on the Auburn University Archives website at www.lib. auburn.edu/archive/display/ rick.htm.

Martin T. Olliff

Comments from CAIE

EDITORÕS NOTE: Below is the first of a regular column by Kris Kiesling, Chair of the Committee on Archival Information Exchange. I would like to express my thanks to Kris for her willingness to contribute this feature and to Rob Spindler for suggesting the idea.

Rob Spindler (immediate past chair of CAIE) suggested to Heather and Ann that the chair of CAIE write a regular column for "Descriptive Notes." Given that I believe there needs to be a stronger connection between the Section and the Committee, I think this is a dandy idea. For the inaugural column I'd like to touch on a number of issues that have come before CAIE in the past several months.

Several important issues relating to archival description have been or are being dealt with by CAIE, including MARC format integration, EAD, and the review of descriptive standards, such as AAT. As you may know, CAIE submitted a proposal relating to format integration to MARBI (the USMARC Advisory Committee), which was discussed at the February 1997 ALA Midwinter meeting in Washington. (The full text of the proposal is available at http://lcweb.loc.gov/marc/. Scroll down the page to the MARC Advisory Committee section, and follow the Gopher links to Proposal 97-07 in the 1997 Proposals folder). Parts of the proposal were approved by MARBI, and other parts were tabled pending further discussion, particularly with the maps and music cataloging communities. A follow-up proposal will be drafted for the 1998 Midwinter meeting.

Another MARC issue has been USMARC and CAN/MARC harmonization--the resolution of differences in the formats (along with UKMARC) that will ultimately result in UNIMARC, a single format used by the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Canadian archivists had submitted a series of requested changes to support the implementation of RAD (Rules for Archival Description) for catalog output. These changes were discussed with a subcommittee of CAIE, and a proposal was submitted to MARBI with CAIE support (same URL as above, Proposal 96-08, which is in several parts, not all of which deal with archival issues). With minor changes, the proposal was approved by MARBI in February. This cooperation between US and Canadian archivists has opened the door for future joint ventures, such as the creation of a set of North American archival descriptive standards.

As reported in the Winter 1996-97 issue of "Descriptive Notes," CAIE has formed a Working Group on Encoded Archival Description. The Working Group is charged with monitoring the development of EAD as a potential descriptive standard. The WG is currently reviewing EAD documentation, including the tag library and application guidelines, and will also review comments and suggestions for changes to the DTD over the summer, with an eye

toward a full release version in the fall.

One of CAIE's responsibilities is to review proposed archival descriptive standards that are submitted to the Standards Board. Last year CAIE was asked, as were other bodies within SAA, to carry out an evaluation of the Art and Architecture Thesaurus as a descriptive standard. The culmination of this review process was that SAA Council endorsed the AAT.

In past years CAIE members have carried primary responsibility for submitting proposals relating to descriptive issues to the SAA annual meeting program committees. CAIE's plate is very full, and it would be very appropriate for the Section to at least share that responsibility if not assume it totally. For that to happen, however, I think it would be advisable for the Section to have an elected, rather than volunteer, steering committee. Other SAA sections have such a body. For example, the Manuscripts Repositories Section steering committee submits program proposals, sets the program for the section meeting, supports the creation of informational brochures, and recruits section members to run for elected office.

CAIE has its own listserv, SAACAIE, which is managed by former Committee member Richard Pearce-Moses. While it is a private list in that only list members may post messages, membership is open to anyone who has an interest in the Committee's business and descriptive issues. (It is not, however, meant to be an open forum for questions relating to description, which are more appropriately directed to the LCSH-AMC list.) If you are interested in subscribing to CAIE's listserv, send a message to Richard at rpm@primenet.com and ask him to subscribe you. Of course some Committee business is handled off the list, but generally the discussion is very open.

If you're interested in finding out more about what CAIE does or have issues that you think CAIE should consider, join us at our meeting, which is held on the Wednesday before the SAA annual meeting, usually from 8:00 to 3:00 (see the annual meeting program for exact time and place). CAIE meetings are open to anyone who wishes to attend. I believe we'll also be holding office hours at the Chicago meeting (again, consult the annual meeting program). Come visit with us!

Web News

The New Orleans City Archives, New Orleans Public Library announces the addition of the following sites to its web page.

Inventory of the letters, petitions, and decrees of the Cabildo, Conseil Municipal, and Conseil de Ville, 1770-1835 [http://home.gnofn.org/~nopl/inv/_ab3201.htm]   a Netscape tables version of an early 20th century translation of the 1845 French manuscript inventory.

Index to the original suit records of the First Judicial District Court, 1813-1833 [http://home.gnofn.org/~nopl/inv/1jdc/1jdcind.htm]-- an alphabetical listing, by name of plaintiff, of the suit records from that early New Orleans civil court.

Genealogical Materials in the Louisiana Division and City Archives of the New Orleans Public Library [http://home.gnofn.org/~nopl/guides/genguide/ggcover.htm]--full text of the LibraryÕs soon-to-be-published new edition of its genealogy guide. This online version has "interactive" links to fuller descriptions and/or indexes to NOPLÕs own materials as well as links to other research materials on the web.

Guide to Building Plans in the City Archives [http:home.gnofn.org/~nopl/plans/planlist.htm]   a list, arranged by street address, of the local building plans, 1895-1995, in the NOPL collection.

Wayne Everard

HARVARD/RADCLIFFE DIGITAL FINDING AIDS PROJECT (DFAP) WEB SITE NOW AVAILABLE

The Harvard/Radcliffe library system includes 49 separate archival repositories, posing an obvious problem to researchers trying to locate a manuscript cited simply as "at Harvard." The special collections community has long sought a way to simplify and improve access to Harvard/Radcliffe's large and varied collections of primary source material (archives, manuscripts, photographs, drawings, ephemera, etc.).

In response to the recommendations of the Special Collections Task Force report (1994), the Harvard University Library Automation Planning Committee established the Digital Finding Aids Project (DFAP) in February 1995. DFAP's charge is to plan and oversee the design and deployment of a new computer application system to store, search, and retrieve digital finding aids in Standard Generalized Markup Language (SGML) format for all Harvard/Radcliffe repositories in a shared database. The digital finding aids supplement the summary information about archival collections already available in Harvard's on-line catalog, HOLLIS.

Presently, eight repositories are participating in the project: Baker Library (Business School), Design School, Divinity School, the Gray Herbarium and Houghton Library (Harvard College Library), Law School, Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America (Radcliffe), and the Harvard University Archives.

The DFAP web site includes a history of the project to date; Harvard guidelines for using SGML for finding aids, based on the Encoded Archival Description (EAD), a proposed national standard; repository-specific versions of the guidelines; and a growing number of SGML-encoded finding aids (you must have an SGML-aware viewer to use them; a link is available at the site).

The project's primary focus to date has been to mark up a wide variety of differently formatted finding aids using SGML. It quickly became clear that, given the divergence of traditional practice at Harvard/Radcliffe repositories, a pan-Harvard standard (based, of course, on the emerging national standard, the Electronic Archival Description (EAD)) was needed. A draft standard is now completed and is available on the Project's web site. It is constantly being refined, and individual repositories are working on their own implementation standards. A style sheet, to display all Harvard finding aids, is also being constantly revised. The mark-up of the finding aids at the project site is often altered, as the participants gain more experience with the challenges of both SGML and of finding a common standard that will suit the varied needs and traditions of Harvard/Radcliffe repositories.

The web site is updated frequently, so please check it occasionally for new finding aids and new information. For further information about the project please contact any of the project participants, whose names and institutional affiliations are listed at the project web site (http://hul.harvard.edu/dfap).

Leslie A. Morris

State Archives Posts Maps Database on Internet

The Texas State Library and Archives Commission is pleased to announce the addition to its web site of a searchable database of the ÒHistoric Map Collection of the Texas State Library.Ó Located at http://link.tsl.state.tx.us/m/mapform.htm, the map database contains catalog records for original, photo-reproduced, and compiled maps covering the period from the early 17th century through the late 20th.

Material now accessible through the Internet includes general maps of Texas, the U.S. and Mexico; 18th-20th century world atlases; birdÕs eye views of Texas cities; and coastal charts and other nautical maps. Other subjects are: Texas Highway Department county road maps; General Land Office county survey maps; state and county geological maps; highway and road maps; military survey and reconnaissance maps; oil and gas maps; plans of forts, missions, presidios, and battlegrounds; railroad maps; soil survey maps; street maps; town plats; and U.S. Geological Survey maps showing the topography of various Texas counties prior to 1900. Instructions and prices for ordering copies of available maps are listed. The State Library welcomes comments on its map database, and has provided a ÒComments and QuestionsÓ e-mail address for map users.

Laura Saegert

Research

Evaluating Archival Description from a UserÕs Point of View: A Focus Group Study

In 1990, the Bureau of Canadian Archivists published the Rules for Archival Description (RAD), a comprehensive set of rules for describing archival material based upon AACR2. Archivists across Canada use these rules to describe their material, and MARBI has recently approved changes to the MARC format to facilitate the creation and exchange of RAD-compliant records. Since October 1995, the American archival community in conjunction with UCLA Berkeley Library has been developing a SGML encoding standard for archival finding aids. Although RAD and EAD have the potential to revolutionize the description of and access to archival material, there has yet to be any empirical research on these standards or their application. Furthermore, the archival profession lacks all but the most basic information about how users seek information and the kind of knowledge representation users require to access archival material. My research aims to address this lacuna.

 This research study will use focus groups of archival users to obtain opinions on archival descriptions and the presentation of these descriptions in OPACs and the web. This study will answer the following research questions.

· What information about archival materials would users like to see displayed in an OPAC or on the web?

· How would the users like the material to be displayed?

The study will use displays from the systems in these archives including Gencat, Sirsi, and Inmagic, as well as a description based on EAD, and a prototype display. The focus group session will consist of three parts:

· The subjects will complete two forms that will solicit their opinions on the way systems and the web display information about archival material and their evaluation of the importance of different data elements.

· A structured discussion concerning the information in and the structure of the displays.

· An unstructured discussion and the creation of an ideal display.

The form that will solicit information on the importance of different data elements will use the data elements in RAD. The subjects will be presented with five different displays: a Gencat display, a Sirsi display, an Inmagic display, an EAD display, and a prototype display. The EAD display will comply with the EAD Guidelines and be based on the Library of Congress's EAD format. The prototype display will include many of the enhancements and formatting features that interface design researchers suggest.

Wendy Duff

Book Review

Congressional Papers Management: Collecting, Appraising, Arranging and Describing Documentation of United States Senators, Representatives, Related Individuals and Organizations by Faye Phillips, McFarland & Company, Inc., 1996, 196 pages, $38.50

The purpose of description of congressional papers is to guide the researcher to the materials which she or he needs

and to aid the archival staff in locating those items," writes Faye Phillips in her new book, Congressional Papers Management. This simple statement masks the complexity of describing these collections created by members of Congress and ranging in the hundreds or thousands of cubic feet, but her book provides useful pointers and examples. As head of the Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections at Louisiana State University, Phillips directed the processing of Senator Russell B. Long's papers. While serving as archivist with the U. S. Senate during the 1980s, she saw a need for a manual to help archivists.

For readers of "Descriptive Notes," the most pertinent sections of her book are the two chapters on arrangement and description, which contain useful nuts-and-bolts information. Phillips examines how standards for archival inventories have been applied to finding aids for congressional papers. She provides two different model inventories that show potential subgroups, series, and subseries that might exist, then she provides the hierarchy of the Long Collection as an example. Discussion of the creation of databases and MARC cataloging is also covered, albeit briefly. An entire chapter examines the management of congressional papers by five different repositories. Phillips reproduces examples of series descriptions written for inventories of the Long Collection, the Mike Gravel Papers (University of Alaska--Fairbanks), the Sam B. Hall, Jr., Papers (Baylor University), the Jack Hightower Papers (Baylor University), the Olin Dewitt Talmadge Johnston Papers (University of South Carolina), the Frank Church Papers (Boise State University), and the Henry M. Jackson Papers (University of Washington).

Archivists with congressional papers in their repositories' holdings would do well to read this book. It will be especially important to those bewildered by or unsure about the unprocessed collections languishing in their stacks. Faye Phillips' readers will be rewarded with excellent ideas and examples.

Todd J. Kosmerick

Many thanks to all who contributed to this issue. The deadline for submissions for the winter issue is October 1, 1997.

Please send electronic submissions to Hodges@library.uta.edu, others to:

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