Descriptive Notes

The Newsletter of the Description Section of the Society of American Archivists   **Summer 2001**

From the Chair   Bill Landis

This is an exciting time to be an archivist interested in issues concerning the intersection between descriptive data and online archival information systems as the latter continue to develop and mature! It seems to me that there are ample opportunities for the Description Section to get involved in raising the awareness of SAA members regarding ever-evolving issues concerning descriptive standards and the design and implementation of information systems that provide access to descriptive data about archival collections in their multi-level glory.

In her Spring 1984 *American Archivist* article "In the Eye of the Beholder," Elsie Freeman Finch cautioned archivists that "we need soon to shift our emphasis so that we do not become caught up in Ä technologies that only make more quickly and expensively the mistakes we have made manually." The development of archival information systems accessible to end-users over the World Wide Web, I think, raises some important issues for us as archival professionals, but also specifically for members of the Description Section. Last year's Description Section Finding Aids Fair (FAF) focused on the General International Standard Archival Description (ISAD(G)) and how it can help us to incorporate some minimum level of standardized data elements into our descriptive tools, whether in print or electronic form. This year's FAF, organized by section Vice-Chair Mary Lacy, will spotlight "best practice" guidelines for finding aid preparation and EAD encoding being developed by various institutions and consortia. Many of these best practices have been developed with an eye towards incorporating ISAD(G)-defined elements into all levels of a multi-level archival description.

As we share our descriptive data--be it at the collection, item, or even record keeping-system level--with end-users at the other end of a network connection, it becomes increasingly critical that we pay closer attention to standardization of that data. Why? Our focus in the past has been on forcing end-users wishing to access information in our repositories to learn how to use the tools we created for ourselves to manage our fonds, collections, and record groups. In the online world of 21st Century information access, all signs point towards the increasing role that user-centered design of information systems will play in shaping end-user expectations for finding, accessing, displaying, and using information from archival systems available on the Web. Moreover, in the world of digital access, end-users will increasingly expect to be able to search across, find, amalgamate, and utilize information from a variety of online resources, most of which are not created and managed by archivists. In the article previously cited, Freeman Finch provides the prescient warning that "as technologies for reaching current information make that information more accessible, competition between archivists and other suppliers of information will increase."

Faced with rapid evolution in technologies and strategies for managing information, and with increasingly computer-literate end-users who expect faster and more direct access to information resources, what is a poor archivist to do? It seems to me that the answer is this: focus on the basics! Create standards-based descriptive data that can function well in whatever kinds of information environments emerge in the near and more distant future. Among our challenges are to engage with data structure standards like ISAD(G), to educate ourselves and future generations of archivists about the benefits of investing in standards, and to participate in public review of emerging efforts such as the CUSTARD project to harmonize Canadian (RAD) and U.S. (APPM) data content standards. Only through focusing on the creation of robust descriptive data and metadata can we insure that future end-users of online systems will be able to access and use archival information in ways that meet their needs and expectations.

Following our annual Description Section meeting on Friday, August 31, from 8-10 am in Washington, D.C., I get to turn over the reins of the section to Mary Lacy, who will do a super job as your section chair for the coming year! Serving SAA in the capacity of a section officer has been interesting and enlightening and I encourage those of you who have never done so to consider running for office. There is a great need in both the Society and our profession for your energy and creativity in addressing the challenges of description and access in the world of the Web and

whatever the next major revolution in information access will be.

2001 Finding Aids Fair, Washington, D.C.   Mary Lacy

The Description Section's Finding Aids Fair in Washington will focus on best practices in the creation of finding aids as documented by the manuals, application guidelines, and other standards-based documents we follow in creating our finding aids. These documents determine the intellectual content, format, display, and encoding practices (where applicable) of finding aids whether they are created in SGML/XML format, as databases, using word processing software, or other methods, and whether they are designed to be used locally in paper or electronic format, or on the Web.

We welcome the submission of current tools (whether in final form or work-in-progress) as well as guidelines which have stood the test of time. These tools may be in paper or electronic format, and may have been developed for the use of an individual repository or of a consortium of multiple institutions. You are encouraged to share with your colleagues such tools as:

- Manuals for the creation of finding aids
- Manuals for processing of papers and records which include instructions on creating finding aids
- Guidelines for the inclusion of finding aids in consortia
- Application guidelines for the encoding of finding aids
- Guidelines for the integration of finding aids and catalog records in your descriptive system
- Lists of the descriptive standards you draw on in creating finding aids (e.g., ISAD(G), APPM, RAD, AAT and other specialized thesauri)
- Exemplary finding aids which have resulted from your application of these guidelines and standards

Stop by the Finding Aids Fair booth in the Exhibition area on Thursday and Friday during this year's SAA meeting in Washington to get ideas (and share your successes) with other toilers in the descriptive vineyards. A bibliography of submissions, with URLs for online resources, will be made available on the Web after SAA.

To contribute, please contact Mary Lacy by e-mail (mlac@loc.gov) or phone at (202) 707-8799. Finding aid tools and finding aids may also be submitted by snail mail to Mary Lacy, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540-4682.

Section Meeting Highlights   Bill Landis

The Description Section will meet on Friday, August 31st, from 8-10 AM at the SAA Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C. Following our usual business of reports and program proposal discussions, we'll have two very interesting presentations.

Waverly Lowell of the Environmental Design Archives at the University of California, Berkeley, will discuss with section members the publication "Standard Series for Architecture and Landscape Design Records: A Tool for the Arrangement and Description of Archival Collections," which she co-wrote with Kelcy Shepherd and which was recently announced as this year's winner of SAA's C.F.W. Coker Award for Description. This will be an interesting opportunity for section members to consider and discuss the possible use of the standard series concept for other types of records and the role that this might play in facilitating greater end-user comprehension of archival descriptive tools.

Following Waverly's presentation, Robin Chandler, Manager of the Online Archive of California (OAC), one of the oldest and largest EAD consortial projects, will discuss a project to create a K-12 thesaurus of controlled vocabulary terminology that will be used in interface developments for the OAC's current "California Cultures" virtual collection project, which has as one specific goal reaching and serving the needs of the K-12 community in California.

These discussions will occupy the second hour of the section meeting and should be fodder for interesting discussions, both during the section meeting and beyond. Hope to see many of you there!

AGENDA

Description Section Meeting
Friday, August 31, 2001

I. **Welcome from the Chair**

II. **Reports from SAA Committees and Liaisons**

- EAD Working Group - Kris Kiesling
- US MARC Advisory Board (MARBI) - Michael Fox
- ICA Committee on Descriptive Standards - Michael Fox
- Canadian/U.S. Taskforce on Archival Description (CUSTARD) project update - Jean Dryden, Editor and Project Manager
- SAA Technical Subcommittee on Descriptive Standards (TSDS) - Dennis Meissner
- OCLC - Susan Westberg
- RLG - Anne Van Camp
- ALA Committee on Cataloging: Description and Access (CC:DA) - Susan Hamburger

III. **Section Reports**

- *Descriptive Notes* - Ann Hodges
- Section Web Site - Diana Smith
- Finding Aids Fair - Mary Lacy

IV. **Ongoing Business**

- Publications underway or proposed - Sue Hodson, Chair, SAA Publications Board
- Section-sponsored sessions on the 2001 program - Bill Landis
- Ideas for 2002 program sessions - Mary Lacy

V. **New Business**

VI. **Election of Vice-Chair/Chair-Elect** (results announced at the end of the program)

VII. **Program**

- Waverly Lowell, Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley - presentation on and discussion of "Standard Series for Architecture and Landscape Design Records: A Tool for the Arrangement and Description of Archival Collections"
- Robin Chandler, Manager, Online Archive of California - presentation on and discussion of project to create a K-12 thesaurus of descriptive terms for the Online Archive of California

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NEH Grant Supports Harmonization of Standards   Susan Fox

The Society of American Archivists, in collaboration with the Canadian Council of Archives, is pleased to announce that it has received funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities to support the process of reconciling the two principal North American standards for archival description with each other and with a broader international

standard. The anticipated final product of this project will be a manual of archival description which reconciles APPM (*Archives, Personal Papers and Manuscripts*) and RAD (*Rules for Archival Description*) within the structure of ISAD(G) (General International Standard Archival Description).

It is expected that the resulting standard will also form the basis of a content standard for EAD, as well as laying the foundation for the development of broader and more comprehensive international standards. Such standards will contribute significantly to more consistent description of archival holdings in repositories around the world, while at the same time greatly enhancing user access to these holdings.

The production of this Canadian/U.S. manual of archival description will be a joint effort of the Society of American Archivists and the Canadian Council on Archives. The main part of this project will take place between July 2001 and June 2002, with the first meeting of four meetings planned for Toronto in July. The work will be accomplished through the efforts of a Steering Committee, an Editor/Project Manager, and an editorial and consultative group, designated as the Canadian/U.S. Task Force on Archival Description (CUSTARD). The Steering Committee will consist of the Chair of the SAA Standards Committee (Kris Kiesling), the Chair of the Canadian Committee on Archival Description (Bob Krawczyk), Steven Hensen (author of APPM) and Kent Haworth (former Chair of the Bureau of Canadian Archivists Planning Committee on Descriptive Standards).

Jean Dryden will be the Editor and Project Manager, working under the direction of the Steering Committee. She will be responsible for much of the work of creating the new content standard by preparing drafts for discussion and review, incorporating comments, and preparing revised drafts as the harmonized standard takes shape.

The task force will consist of six representatives from the U.S. and six representatives from Canada. The U.S. membership will consist of two members of the SAA Technical Subcommittee on Descriptive Standards (Roslyn Holdzkom and Bill Landis); the chair of the SAA Standards Committee (Kris Kiesling); the SAA representative to MARBI and the ICA Committee on Descriptive Standards (Michael Fox); a representative from the National Archives and Records Administration (Lydia Reid); and a representative from the Library of Congress (Margit Kerwin). The Canadian representatives will be the current members of the Canadian Committee on Archival Description: Gerald Stone, Mario Robert, Marlene van Ballegooie, Lucie Pagþ, Tim Hutchinson and a new member. The project director, who will have general responsibility for oversight and management of the entire project, will be Susan Fox, Executive Director of the Society of American Archivists.

SAA members will have an opportunity to learn more about this project at the Annual Meeting in Washington. Steve Hensen, Bob Krawczyk and Jean Dryden will participate in a session on September 1st entitled "Dancing the Continental: Harmonizing Data Content Standards for Archival Description."

EAD Working Group Update   Kris Kiesling

The EAD Working Group met in Washington, D.C., April 27-29, 2001, to discuss the 67 submissions for changes to the DTD that had been received between December and March. Of the submissions, 46 came from non-U.S. individuals and institutions, and many involved bringing EAD in line with the second edition of ISAD(G), published last year. The list of submissions and a set of *Design Principles for Enhancements to EAD* are available from the EAD web site (http://lcweb.loc.gov/ead/). A number of changes, several of which will facilitate the use of EAD internationally, were approved by the group. Backward compatibility was a primary concern. The DTD will be updated and tested over the summer, while members of the WG work on definitions for the new elements that were created, clarify definitions for existing elements, and create a new set of examples. The goal is to have the EAD 2002 Tag Library available in hard copy and online before the end of the calendar year.

Canadian/U.S. Task Force on Archival Description   Jean Dryden
                                                            Editor and Project Manager

I have been asked to share some thoughts about the CUSTARD project from my perspective as Editor and Project Manager. As I write this (late May), the group has not yet held its first meeting, and I have more questions than answers! Naturally, the following comments represent only my views which may not be shared by the other members of the group. While I will be doing much of the detailed work to integrate RAD and APPM within the framework of ISAD(G), the final product will, of course, be the result of input from all members of the group and the broader groups they represent.

That said, I look forward to this project with great enthusiasm (and, I confess, with some trepidation). I am excited about the task of developing a new data content standard for archival description, and its potential to serve as the foundation for comprehensive international description standards. However, having been a member of the Canadian Working Group on Archival Descriptive Standards, the first chair of the Planning Committee on Descriptive Standards, and a member of the U.S. Working Group on Standards for Archival Description, I am under no illusions that it will be easy. The members of CUSTARD are familiar with their own parts of the descriptive standards development highway, but in this case, two groups who have not traveled much together are sharing a vehicle which has turned onto a new road leading (they hope) to the town of New Standard. The road may be bumpy in places, and the occupants of the vehicle may not always agree on where they are going, exactly how to get there, how fast to drive, or how to share the driving. These matters will be resolved in the course of the trip, and I am optimistic that the bus (and all its occupants) will safely reach its destination. If I have a particular concern, it is that insufficient time has been allotted for the archival communities in Canada and the U.S. to review and comment on the proposed standard before it is approved.

Many more questions extend beyond the scope of the current project. The resulting standard will be a significant achievement in itself; however it is just the beginning of a much larger process. If the proposed new standard is to be adopted and widely used, a number of other things need to happen. The issue of training to acquaint archivists with the new standard needs to be addressed. Institutions will need to consider many issues as they determine exactly how to implement the new standard. No standard is cast in stone, and it is essential that an ongoing process and structure for maintenance be established to make decisions about requests for rule revisions and to issue consolidated revisions periodically. While these matters are outside the project, ways to address these issues will undoubtedly be considered in the course of the group's discussions. The input of the Description Section will be an essential part of the process, and I look forward to providing an update to the annual Description Section meeting in Washington.

Absentee Ballots Available

Absentee ballots for the election of a Vice-Chair/Chair-Elect will be made available upon request to Description Section members who will not be attending the Annual Meeting in Washington. Absentee ballots may be requested by one of the following methods from Bill Landis, Section Chair:

E-mail: Send your e-mail request containing your name and address to blandis@uci.edu by Friday, August 3rd.

Post: Send a request, postmarked by Monday, July 30th, containing your name and address to Bill Landis, Special Collections and Archives, The UC Irvine Libraries, P.O. Box 19557, Irvine, CA 92623-9557.

Telephone: Call (949) 824-3113 and leave your name and address by Friday, August 3rd.

All absentee ballots must be returned by mail to Bill Landis at the address listed above and must be postmarked by Friday, August 17th, 2001, in order to be valid.

Focus on Description-Related Sessions   Bill Landis

The Description Section has had another banner year for endorsing session proposals and having them accepted by the Program Committee! The section's Steering Committee received eight proposals requesting section endorsement. Vice-Chair Mary Lacy and Descriptive Notes Editor Ann Hodges graciously agreed to rank the proposals endorsed by the

Description Section at the request of 2001 Program Committee chair Karen Benedict for the benefit of committee members in their deliberations.

The following excellent program proposals, several of which emerged from discussions at the section meeting in Denver, were endorsed by the Description Section and are on the 2001 program. I encourage you to attend these and other description-related sessions, and to come to the section meeting on August 31st with ideas to discuss for the 2002 program in Birmingham!

Thursday, August 30th, 1:30-3:00 PM:

Session 3. **EAD Implementation: Strategies for the Rest of Us**. Chair: Michael Fox; Speakers: Gina Minks, Elizabeth Dow, and Christopher Prom.

Thursday, August 30th, 3:30-5:00 PM:

Session 13. **The Internationalization of EAD: A Clash with Descriptive Standards?** Chair: Meg Sweet; Speakers: Catherine Dherent, Tim Hutchinson, and Bill Stockting.

Friday, August 31st, 10:30 AM-Noon:

Session 27. **Collaboration Required?: Building Information Resources Beyond Our Own Institutions.** Chair: Jackie Dooley; Speakers: Robin Chandler, Kris Kiesling, and Anne Van Camp.

Friday, August 31st, 1:30-3:00 PM:

Session 34. **To EAD or Not to EAD--Is That Really the Question?** Chair: Bill Wallach; Speakers: Jill Tatem, Daniel Linke, and Prudence Backman.

Saturday, September 1st, 10:00-11:30 AM:

Session 47. **Dancing the Continental: Harmonizing Data Content Standards for Archival Description**. Chair: Lisa Weber; Speakers: Steve Hensen, Bob Krawczyk, and Jean Dryden.

News Notes

Penn State Contributes to PIPS Web Site

(Section member Susan Hamburger reports on her completion of the Penn State University Special Collections Library's contribution to the Partners in Public Service website [http://www.pips.psu.edu/entry.html].)

In the spring of 2001, the Palmer Museum of Art at Penn State hosted an exhibition of daguerreian photography. The companion web site is the result of a collaborative effort between the Palmer Museum, the University Libraries, Penn State Public Broadcasting, and the Pennsylvania Center for the Book. The partnership is designed to maximize the impact of each member institution by combining the individual strengths to enhance the rich and diverse experiences and services offered to the communities they serve.

Special Collections provided sixty-one daguerreotype, cartes-de-visite, and cabinet card images representing advertising, celebrity, studio practices, and war from two of their major photographic collections, the Heinz K. and Bridget A. Henisch Collection of the History of Photography and the William C. Darrah Collection of Cartes-de-visite. The topical groupings lead the viewer to a page of thumbnail images with identifying information (photographer, date, title, name of collection); clicking on the thumbnail brings up a full size image with descriptive text.

Partners in Public Service (PIPS) is an experiment in collaboration, focusing on partnerships between Libraries, Museums and Public Television Station entities that have historically operated independent of one another. PIPS is a

year long national initiative administered by Penn State and funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) and Institute of Museum and Library Services. PIPS planning began a few years ago; this past spring, public service organizations were researched and invited to join the initiative as participating test sites in 2000 and 2001. From the many applications received, eight test sites were chosen: Penn State; Wisconsin; Pittsburgh, PA; Cincinnati, OH; San Antonio, TX; Kentucky; Connecticut; and Denver, CO.

The goal of each test site collaboration is to work through a public service project and discover each partner's strengths, knowledge, cultural differences, and community connections. While the resulting project is beneficial to the public, the purpose is to create a toolkit that can be used by others to develop their own collaborative initiatives. This toolkit will contain test site case studies, lessons learned, a list of resources and considerations, cultural experiences, and even information such as how often the members met and how the task structure developed during the project.

In May 2001, Susan Hamburger spent a week in Cocoa, Florida, as a manuscripts consultant to the Florida Historical Society's Tebeau-Field Library. Run by volunteers, the library has a rich collection of Florida manuscripts documenting the history of the state back to the Spanish period. Sue wrote a processing manual for use by the volunteers and also arranged and described two collections, the Minerva Jennings Papers and the Francis P. Fleming Papers. The volunteers will be able to use the finding guides created by Sue as models to follow for other collections. Catalog records for the collections will become available in June through LC's National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections program.

TSDS in Action
Dennis Meissner, TSDS Chair
Minnesota Historical Society

SAA's Technical Subcommittee on Descriptive Standards is a task group that advises the Standards Board (its parent body) and SAA Council on new and emerging descriptive standards that are likely to affect the archival profession. In the past this group has critiqued various aspects of EAD and ISAD(G), as well as the Dublin Core metadata set, and has requested changes to various MARC21 bibliographic fields, among other things.

TSDS is currently taking a detailed look at the ICA's (International Council on Archives) International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families. ISAAR(CPF) was published in 1996 and is therefore up for its scheduled 5-year review this summer. The standard, as its name suggests, is concerned with defining an internationally acceptable standard for creating descriptive records about the creators of archival documents. Since this is an existing standard that is being revisited, rather than one being created anew, the ICA is specifically seeking only (1) the addition of new elements where clearly warranted based on the experience of users of the standard, and (2) suggestions for improvements in language clarity and in the examples used to illustrate the rules.

TSDS will be offering formal comments to the ICA in this regard over the next month. Any *Descriptive Notes* readers who are interested in looking at the existing 21-page ISAAR(CPF) document will find it in several different formats on the ICA website (http://www.ica.org). Any of you who have comments on the standard that you would like TSDS to consider should e-mail them to its chair at dennis.meissner@mnhs.org. We would be happy to hear from you.

Later this summer TSDS will move on to study the Canadian Council of Archives' *Rules for Archival Description*, in preparation for the review and critique that it will be called upon to make in another year when the Canadian/U.S. Task Force on Archival Description produces the first draft of the manual that will attempt to reconcile RAD and APPM within the ISAD(G) structure. TSDS is also taking on responsibility for updating and maintaining the online version of SAA's *Standards for Archival Description: A Handbook*, available on the SAA website. The subcommittee also intends to remain involved in the development of a descriptive standards curriculum within the continuing education efforts of the Society. For more information about TSDS and its activities, take a look at its website (http://sun3.lib.uci.edu/~blandis/tsds/), constructed and ardently maintained by Bill Landis, UC-Irvine.

Candidates Needed!

The Description Section still needs candidates to run for the office of Vice-Chair/Chair-Elect. Postings to the Archives listserv and personal contacts by the Section Chair have garnered only a single candidate, who will run unopposed if no additional candidates are identified prior to the August 3rd deadline for requesting absentee ballots.

If you are interested in running or would like to nominate someone, please contact Bill Landis [blandis@uci.edu or (949) 824-3113]. The Vice-Chair/Chair-Elect is responsible for coordinating the Section's Finding Aids Fair at the Annual Meeting, and will succeed as Section Chair the following year.

The Vice-Chair/Chair-Elect must be a Description Section member and a full or student member of SAA, as defined in the SAA Constitution. (Please see http://www.archivists.org/governance/handbook/section6.htm).