

Descriptive Notes

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

Winter 2002

From the Chair

Mary Lacy

These are exciting times (even "interesting times") for those of us in the business of archival description -- a cliched statement, but true. We're witnessing the fruits of some of our efforts in descriptive standards, handling of digital materials, and encoding finding aids for remote delivery; surely we know what we're doing by now! But we're also on the brink of changing long-held practices. Witness the work of the Canadian/U.S. Task Force on Archival Description (CUSTARD), which promises a new era of multinational harmony in descriptive standards. Can this harmony be achieved if there are substantial differences from our current APPM-based U.S. consensus? And Encoded Archival Description (EAD) has been widely embraced (at least in theory) as the standard for the dissemination of finding aids in electronic form. But its flexibility in adapting to local and retrospective practices has led to differing practices detrimental to efficient searching of union databases and to the development of easy-to-use tools for the creation and publication of finding aids; work is now underway to define a uniform "best practice." We agree in principle that the adoption of standards benefits us all on many levels; will we be able to adapt our customary practices as the scope of emerging standards continues to enlarge? Section members are addressing these questions and more by participating in a wide range of initiatives which we'll learn more about in the coming year through programs at SAA annual meetings, articles in Descriptive Notes and other publications, and the Description Section's web site. Stay tuned!

Visit the Section's web site at <http://www.archivists.org/saagroups/descr>

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Out with the Old, and in with the New...Section Newsletter Editor!!!

It's hard to believe it has been five years since I took over editorship of Descriptive Notes from Dan Linke. I appreciate having had the opportunity to serve the Description Section and, especially, to get to know and work with many Section members. I hope to expand those ties in future efforts on behalf of SAA.

I think we can all look forward to benefiting from a fresh perspective, which I have no doubt the new editor, John Rees, will bring. Please see below for his introduction of himself to the Section membership.

The picture of "John" on page 8 [only in printed version] is provided in the tradition of newsletter editor humor begun by Dan when, in his introduction of me, he included a graphic of "me" with my supposed dog, Provenance. Those of you acquainted with John may detect a passing resemblance...

Just kidding, John. Thank you for volunteering to take over, and have fun.

Ann Hodges, Outgoing Newsletter Editor
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Minutes from the 2001 Meeting August 31, 2001

Welcome from the Chair/Reports from SAA Committees and Liaisons

Bill Landis, Section Chair, opened the 2001 Description Section by thanking Section Vice Chair, Mary Lacy, and Newsletter Editor, Ann Hodges, for their work during the year. He solicited volunteers to take over the newsletter and reminded Section members of the importance of submitting information and articles to the newsletter. Bill mentioned that Mary would be the first Description Section Chair to be a member of the Coker Awards subcommittee since 1983, and opened the floor to reports by SAA liaisons.

Michael Fox - US MARC Advisory Board (MARBI)

Michael explained that this group oversees and maintains the MARC 21 format in conjunction with LC. He reported that there will be a discussion paper at its forthcoming meeting to define the types of information to be recorded for types of dates.

Issues considered in 2001 were seriality and electronic items--in the inability to tell original collections from the integrated materials they are analogous to archival accessions--and the use of MARC field 887 to accommodate non-MARC information (roundtripping).

Serials were discussed at the ALA MidWinter meeting. Michael recommended that Section members look at the proposals. As none were formalized, he had little to report about them. He found the most interesting to be the UK vote to proceed with the harmonization of UKMARC with MARC 21.

Michael Fox - ICA Committee on Descriptive Standards

Michael reported that the committee presented the revised version of ISAD(G), and announced that the committee's workplan for next three years includes a revision of ISAAR(CPF) and a proposal to study the relationship of Encoded Archival Context (EAC) to ISAD(G) and EAD.

Kris Kiesling - EAD Working Group

As incoming Program Chair for the 2002 meeting, Kris announced the theme for 2002 as Archival Roots: Our Foundation and Our Future. She encouraged the submission of session proposals by October 6. She advised getting endorsements from one or more SSA groups to demonstrate support for the proposals, and stressed that it is important that the proposals be complete so that the programs can be judged properly.

As Chair of the EAD Working Group, Kris reported that it had a busy year. Last year they called for changes to the DTD and received 68 proposals, 47 of which came from outside the United States. The Working Group met in April to discuss the proposals, many of which were to do with bringing EAD back into line with ISAD(G). To do so, an element for every area of description in ISAD(G) would be needed. A new tag library will be released in print and online simultaneously. Daniel Pitti is working on revising the DTD. The Working Group is considering revising the EAD Application Guidelines and making them available online. A member from France was added to the Working Group and EAD documentation is being translated into French.

Susan Hamburger - CC:DA (ALA Committee on Cataloging: Description & Access)

The committee met in 2001 in Washington, D.C., and in San Francisco. Susan did not attend the San Francisco meeting. Its major themes focused on rules for electronic resources and the harmonization of AACR2 with

international standards.

Susan gave a rundown of task force activity, which included consideration of revising AACR2 to accommodate seriality, creation of an appendix of major and minor changes, Uniform Resource Identifiers and how to treat them in cataloging, VRA core categories for describing visual resources, Z39.50 for the Dublin Core metadata element set, and proposed rule changes for AACR2 chapter 3, Cartographic Materials. [See her full report on the TSDS web site at http://sun3.lib.uci.edu/~blandis/tsds/ccda_report_2001.pdf].

Dennis Meissner - TSDS (Technical Subcommittee on Descriptive Standards)

TSDS advises and sometimes speaks for the SAA standards committee by reviewing, commenting on and critiquing proposed standards that relate to archival description. Dennis reported that the most significant thing done by the subcommittee over the past two years was to review ISAAR(CPF). Their primary contribution was to create three fully formed examples of authority records expressed in narrative format rather than as records.

Upcoming work for the subcommittee includes the revision of descriptive standards content in the SAA descriptive standards handbook (to bring them up to date and add content about EAD) and a study of RAD and other descriptive standards in preparation for reviewing the manual that will come from the CUSTARD project.

Full reports and minutes of the TSDS meeting are on the TSDS site at <http://sun3.lib.uci.edu/~blandis/tsds/>. [Dennis' report to SAA's Standards Committee appears below]. Bill noted that TSDS meetings are open and invited section members to attend.

Susan Westberg - OCLC

Susan distributed handouts about new products and events. The OCLC CORC service, in production as of July, is a series of web tools to create catalog records from a URL. It features the ability to create authority records through NACO. The Web Document Digital Archive Pilot Project is a collaboration to develop a digital archive of web documents using the Open Archival Information System (OAIS) model. Initial participants are the Ohio State Library, the Ohio Supercomputer center, the Ohio Historical Society, the Connecticut State Library, and the U.S. Government Printing Office. The project will enable the creation of a preservation metadata record at the time of creation of a bibliographic record. For a public document, a URL will provide access to any user. [See Susan's report to TSDS at: http://sun3.lib.uci.edu/~blandis/tsds/oclc_report_2001.pdf].

Anne Van Camp - RLG

Anne reported on RLG's product, Archival Resources, which brings together bibliographic records and full text finding aids. They are looking at ways to bring their records in line with EAD revisions.

More submissions are being received from international participants. The Malvine project chose to use EAD for description, and wants RLG to integrate the records into the Archival Resources project. Doing so is expected to present a challenge because the Malvine project includes records in five languages.

Anne described Encoded Archival Context as an attempt by a rogue group of standards developers to create a standard way of describing material about creators of archival material. They began with ISAAR(CPF) and looked at existing bodies of authority information. They intend to create a standard set of elements to convey the information so it can be exchanged and used in a variety of ways.

RLG's Cultural Materials Initiative is a member-driven initiative to provide access to cultural materials that are represented by digital surrogates. It includes 3-D materials, sound, motion, art, and performance art. RLG is attempting to find ways to bring these disparate materials, and any standards accompanying them, together and make them searchable with meaningful results. They have developed a data model, and hope to encourage understanding of the need for standards and consistency in their application in description of these types of materials. The Cultural Materials Initiative will be available soon on the RLG site.

Jean Dryden - CUSTARD Project

Jean reported that her task as editor is to support the process of reconciling the two North American data content standards, APPM and RAD, with each other and with ISAD(G). The task force met in July and decided that it would be best to follow the structure of the ISAD(G) areas. There will be no separate media rules chapters; rather, the information will be added at the end of each chapter. There will be rules on the formation of access points and headings as well as rules, based on archival principles, clearly defining levels of description. CUSTARD will move away, as does ISAD(G), from emphasis on bibliographic description models.

Section Reports

Ann Hodges - Newsletter Editor

Ann thanked Section Chair, Bill Landis, for having been very organized and forthcoming with newsletter content. She asked the members in attendance if they were ready to give up a paper newsletter in favor of the electronic version; the response was overwhelmingly in favor of keeping a traditional newsletter. Ann announced that she was ready to consider stepping down as newsletter editor after five years of service, and asked that anyone interested in taking over editorship contact her.

Diana Smith - Web Site

Diana Smith was unable to attend the conference. Bill reported on her behalf that she has been making announcements to the Archives List when new issues of Descriptive Notes are available online. He announced that web templates are beginning to be used for SAA newsletters, and asked for feedback from Section members.

Mary Lacy - Finding Aids Fair

Mary noted that past fairs have focused on exhibiting examples of good finding aids. Last year Bill introduced ISAD(G) and highlighted the way descriptive standards are influencing the way we encode collection finding aids. Submissions were received this year from the Library of Congress, National Library of Medicine, the Houghton Library at Harvard University, and the Online Archive of California; "Standard Series for Architecture and Landscape Design Records: A Tool for the Arrangement and Description of Archival Collections," this year's Coker Prize winner, was displayed as an exemplary finding aid.

Ongoing Business

Sue Hodson, Chair of the SAA Publications Board, gave an update on the activities of the SAA publications board. Of specific interest to Description Section members is Kathleen Roe's forthcoming *Arranging and Describing Archives and Manuscripts*, 2nd ed. Sue pointed out that a dozen titles are now in process, representing a heavy workload for the staff. She recommended that Section members watch the publications listing over the next couple of years. Sue also called for reviewers and asked that volunteers contact her, Teresa Brinati or Dennis Meissner if interested in reading manuscripts.

Bill encouraged the submission of program proposals by Section members and opened the floor to discussion of ideas. Suggestions included the following:

- Looking at the roots of reporting description of archival collections from NISTF to EAD--the development of AMC and EAD and the relationship between them. Have we learned anything in 30 years of archival description?
- EAC and the LCNAF agency history record; the relationships between them and where they are going.
- How to incorporate the DC resource locator standard into EAD.
- The Open Archives Initiative; making EAD searchable.
- How archival methods are being applied to new products/contexts such as Encompass; a specific look at vendors.

New Business

Bill noted that the Section's bylaws are loose as regards the formation of a steering committee and stressed that the Chair could use volunteer help, especially in evaluating program proposals. He explained that the program committee asks sections to rank the proposals they endorse. He asked that interested parties see Mary after the meeting.

Program

The 2001 Section meeting featured two speakers. Robin Chandler, Manager of the Online Archive of California (OAC), talked about a project to create a K-12 thesaurus of controlled vocabulary terminology that will be used in interface development for the OAC's current "California Cultures" virtual collection project. Waverly Lowell of the Environmental Design Archives at the University of California, Berkeley, discussed 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 won the 2001 C.F.W. Coker Award for Description.

Election of Vice Chair/Chair Elect

Bill announced the election of Brad Westbrook as the new Vice Chair and declared the meeting adjourned.

Report from the 2001 Finding Aids Fair

Mary Lacy

The Description Section's Finding Aids Fair in Washington focused 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. The following submissions were exhibited; links are provided to those currently available online. As the draft documents are made available, we will publish the new Web addresses.

- Houghton Library, Harvard University. "Guidelines for Houghton Implementation of the EAD DTD" (guidelines available at: <http://hcl.harvard.edu/houghton/departments/msdept/eadguidelines.html>; Harvard finding aids database with all Harvard EAD guidelines: <http://oasis.harvard.edu>)
- Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. "Manual for Preparing Registers", "Guide to Processing Manuscript Collections" (draft documents, not available online)
- Library of Congress. "Recommended Practices for Encoded Archival Description Finding Aids at the Library of Congress" (unedited partial draft, not yet publicly available online; HTML version on display)
- National Library of Medicine. Processing and cataloging manuals
- Online Archive of California. "Online Archive of California Best Practices Guidelines" <http://www.cdlib.org/about/publications/oacbpg-2001.pdf>
- University of California, Berkeley. Environmental Design Archives. "Standard Series for Architecture and Landscape Design Records: A Tool for the Arrangement and Description of Archival Collections"

CUSTARD Update

Jean Dryden

CUSTARD's (Canada-U.S. Task Force on Archival Description) task is 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 rules for the description of archival holdings which reconcile RAD and APPM within the structure of ISAD(G). It is also expected that the resulting standard will form the basis of a content standard for EAD.

The group had its first meeting in July. Because this is an entirely new venture, considerable time was spent at the first meeting coming to agreement on the broad scope and structure of the standard. We agreed that

- it would follow the structure of ISAD(G)'s seven areas
- there will be no separate media chapters; instead special rules for particular media will be added after the general rules which apply to each element of description
- it would include (as RAD and APPM do) a part on description and a part on choice of access points and the

formation of headings

- the rules will be based on archival principles, including clearly defined levels of description and the rules for multilevel description, and will move away (as ISAD(G) does) from bibliographic description models

The last Section newsletter reported on this project. In the newsletter I used the metaphor of a trip in which two groups who have not travelled much together are sharing a vehicle which has turned onto a new road leading to the town of New Standard.

So the bus is now on the road, with me at the wheel. The rest of the travellers are, for the moment, otherwise occupied in the back of the bus somewhere. It hasn't been a fast start--I've had to do some mapping of each of the standards to ISAD(G), and there has been a certain amount of driving around in circles and some backing up as I did some experimenting with how best to approach the journey and what New Standard should look like. I have a rough draft of the first area (Identity statement) which will be going out to the CUSTARD group for comments in September 2001.

My fellow travellers are soon going to have to stop playing cribbage in the back because I think we're going to hit some rough road soon. We are going to have to make some hard decisions about exactly how the rules will be organized, the extent to which the rules will be one-stop shopping for archival cataloguing, and just how to accommodate the many detailed rules for bibliographic description included in RAD. And then we are going to have to start resolving specific issues, such as what to call the highest level of description, and other areas where the rules and practice differ significantly.

The first draft of the rules will be distributed to the group by 30 November. The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for 14-15 December in Washington.

News Notes

AMIA Compendium of Moving Image Cataloging Practice Available

The *AMIA Compendium of Moving Image Cataloging Practice* is now available from the Society of American Archivists.

The Association of Moving Image Archivists and SAA present this unique resource to fill a current void in archival literature. Because of the range and diversity of institutions that catalog moving image materials, there exists neither a concrete field-wide standard nor a primary cataloging reference tool for their archivists. By presenting a snapshot in time of the cataloging practices of 27 diverse institutions, the *AMIA Compendium of Moving Image Cataloging Practice* offers a choice of various solutions to cataloging problems unique to moving images. The range of institutions examined includes historical societies, university archives, broadcast organizations, museums, and subject-specialized collections. The collections include motion pictures as well as television, film and video, and utilize both MARC and non-MARC cataloging. Ultimately, the *Compendium* addresses important moving image cataloging issues and seeks to fulfill its purpose as that much-needed primary cataloging reference tool.

The *Compendium's* Introduction and Appendix A (fact sheets for participating institutions) are also available on the AMIA website at <http://www.amianet.org>. Appendix E (guidelines and examples) supplements the printed volume and is available online only. To order the book, see the SAA Publications Catalog online at <http://www.archivists.org/catalog/index.asp> or order by phone (312-922-0140) or fax (312-347-1452).

Processing of Clements Papers Completed

The Cushing Library at Texas A&M University is pleased to announce the completion of the processing of the Official State Papers of William P. Clements, Jr., Texas governor whose two terms spanned 1979-1983 and 1987-1991. Clements Professor and Clements Archivist Charles R. Schultz had been working on the project since the fall of 1994. Records of Clements' first term equal 418 feet of documents in fourteen series, and the second term is documented in eight series totaling 274 feet of documents. All of the finding aids are available on the Cushing Library web page at <http://www.tamu.edu/library.cushing/cushing/htm>.

Grants and Projects

The **College of Charleston Library** received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to catalog and help process its Jewish archives. The archives contain material related to Southern Jewish culture with an emphasis on South Carolina and include recorded interviews, manuscripts, photographs and artifacts. • **The Art Institute of Chicago's** Ryerson & Burnham Archives hold a significant collection of American architects' and artists' papers of the 19th - 20th centuries. Funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation is supporting a four-year project to arrange and describe uncataloged collections, write finding aids for these collections and review and edit existing find aids, convert finding aids to EAD, stabilize and conserve collections as necessary, and digitize images from the collections for the museum's web site (<http://www.artic.edu/aic/index.html>). • **The Connecticut State Library** was awarded NHPRC funding to process, arrange, and describe early Connecticut court records and to help develop a plan for improving the preservation of and access to historically important and underutilized judicial records in the State Archives. The project, in addition to improving access to an important body of judicial records, will provide a model for the preservation of court records. • The Mellon Foundation granted funds to the **New-York Historical Society Library** to process prints, photographs, and architectural collections. The project will create finding aids and item-level databases, revise existing cataloging, and identify items needing conservation or rehousing. • VIVA, the **Virtual Library of Virginia**, announced in July 2001 the availability of Virginia Heritage, <http://www.lib.virginia.edu/vhp/>, a database of EAD-encoded finding aids describing archives and manuscripts in eleven repositories in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The full text of the finding aids is searchable by keyword and by individual institution. The **University of Virginia**, representing VIVA, was awarded \$250,000 from the NEH to implement the Virginia Heritage project, which is still underway. • The WGBH Archives in Boston received IMLS funding to arrange and describe 479 video programs, story masters, field footage tapes and supporting documentation from WGBH The Ten O'Clock News (TOCN) television series. The project will preserve and create access to tapes that relate to the life, politics, cultural and economy of Boston's African American community and civil rights between 1974 and 1991. It will feature a web-accessible guide embedded with one minute streaming video clips and enhancement options including Closed Captioning and Descriptive Video.

TSDS 2001 Report

Dennis Meissner

The past year turned out to be an extremely quiet one for TSDS, even more so than was anticipated at its 2000 annual meeting. Only two items relating to descriptive standards were submitted to the subcommittee for review, and only small progress was made on the additional items that we put on the agenda at the Denver meeting.

There are notable personnel changes to report at year's end. Following the 2000 meeting, Susan Hamburger was appointed to fill the position of SAA liaison to ALA CC:DA, which had been vacated by Michael Fox. Susan Potts McDonald and Alden Monroe rotate off TSDS after the 2001 meeting. They will be replaced by Susie Bock of Southern Maine University and Chris Prom of the University of Illinois. Lynn Holdzkom will assume the chair being vacated by Dennis Meissner, who remains on the subcommittee for one more year. We welcome the new roles and, especially, the new and talented faces on TSDS for the coming year. Following are brief summaries of TSDS activities during the period since the 2000 meeting.

NISO Draft Standard. Data Dictionary: Technical Metadata for Digital Still Images: A request by the Standards Committee for comments on this draft data dictionary brought in virtually no TSDS comment. This is perhaps attributable to the special expertise required in this case. The metadata being considered were not the descriptive metadata that TSDS usually deals with, but were instead technical parameters of the digital manifestations.

Representation at October 2001 CCAD Meeting: For a second year, SAA provided funding for a U.S. representative to a meeting of the Canadian Committee on Archival Description. Dennis Meissner attended the October 27-29 rules revision meeting in Toronto. Though officially an observer, the meeting provided many opportunities to answer questions and express opinions relating to U.S. practices. It is the chair's hope that SAA will continue this annual practice, which affords a fine opportunity to view and acknowledge Canadian work in descriptive standards. While

CUSTARD project work may lessen the value of this representation in the short run, it will still be a valuable practice over the long run.

Review of ISAAR(CPF), 1996 version: The big project of the year turned out to be our review of the International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families (1996), which was up for its required five-year review. Following intermittent comments during the late spring and early summer, we submitted a review containing a few general comments and criticisms, accompanied by three fully formed record examples expressed in the narrative format usually found in archival inventories or registers. The full text of the TSDS review is found at <http://sun3.lib.uci.edu/~blandis/tsds/isaar-examples.htm>.

Examination of RAD: One of the tasks that TSDS set for itself at the 2000 meeting was to facilitate an online discussion of the Canadian Rules for Archival Description for the purpose of preparing subcommittee members to review the draft manual that will come out of the CUSTARD project. Having discussed the matter at the CCAD meeting in Toronto, the chair decided to wait until the publication of RAD Revealed, and then use it as the training tool to accomplish this objective. The latter publication was delayed and did not appear until mid-year, and I was unable to pull the project together at that point. At the 2001 meeting we will be discussing what TSDS really needs to know about RAD, ISAD(G), and other relevant standards in order to prepare for the CUSTARD review. I will then get that work moving during the coming year.

Revision and Maintenance of SAA Descriptive Standards Handbook: Another task we had set ourselves was to review the online handbook and recommend and make changes necessary to bring it into conformity with existing standards. Although work did not progress during much of the year, Brad Westbrook has recently been studying the manual and will come to the Washington meeting with suggestions for moving this work forward.

Hello from the Suburbs of Washington, D.C.

For better or worse, I volunteered to take over the editorial duties of Descriptive Notes from Ann. By way of introduction, I first joined SAA in 1993, after I began my first job as an archivist at the Virginia State Library and Archives. I graduated from Mary Washington College (1990) with a B.A. in American History, and then went on to get an M.A. in Southern Studies from Ole Miss (1992). Like many, I fell into archives work with a thump, while processing local court records for the VSLA's Circuit Court Records Preservation Program. There I decided to become a professional archivist and took off for Austin, Texas, and library school, where I received my M.L.I.S. with a concentration in Archival Enterprise in 1997.

In Austin I cataloged for an antiquarian books dealer and also worked at various UT archival repositories, primarily the Center for American History. I returned to Virginia as a manuscripts cataloger for the Library of Virginia's Digital Library Program, and since then have been the Associate Curator of Modern Manuscripts at the National Library of Medicine for the past two years. Ahhh, middle management.

I look forward to serving the Section, to meeting many more members (especially as you contribute to the newsletter!), and to having some fun along the way. Mostly I want to make sure a Texas connection remains at the helm.

Yours in fun,

John P. Rees
Associate Curator, Modern Manuscripts
History of Medicine Division
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