

# Descriptive Notes

---

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

Summer 2003

---

## *From the Chair*

*Brad Westbrook*

I wish to thank all the members of the SAA Description Section for the opportunity to serve you and the section this past year. It has been an interesting year, highly active at some times and slow at the others. For me, the year began with the Finding Aids Fair last year, which had digital object description as its theme. Soon after returning home from the Birmingham conference, officers of the section turned their attention to reviewing and endorsing session proposals for the upcoming SAA meeting in Los Angeles. Of the nine proposals endorsed, five were accepted as session proposals. However, one or two proposals that discussed favorably in section meetings did not win the decision of this year's program committee.

The winter and spring months were quiet. Members of the CUSTARD project met a few times, and an interesting report on their activities will be presented in Los Angeles at this year's section meeting. The Online Archive of California, first to construct a Best Practices Guideline for Encoding Finding Aids with EAD, has decided to be first to revise its BPG to reflect EAD 2.0. That work is underway and expected to be concluded shortly before the SAA meeting.

This year's section meeting will be divided into the customary two parts. The first part occupied with reports from committee's and liaisons, election of the chair elect for next year, and other business. The second part, as if closing the circle of the year, will feature members of the Online Archive of California's Cal Cultures project team. They will be discussing their efforts to develop statewide standard for describing digital objects and to construct tools to facilitate the deployment of the METS digital object standard by diverse repositories across the state of California.

Again, let me express my gratitude for the opportunity to serve this past year. I look forward to seeing you all in Los Angeles.

## **Section Meeting Agenda**

### **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 - M. Fox

OCLC - Susan Westberg

RLG - Anne Van Camp

RLG EAD Advisory Group - Dennis Meissner

SAA Technical Subcommittee on Descriptive Standards (TSDS) - Meissner

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

CUSTARD - Kris Keisling

2004 Annual Meeting- Mark Greene/Christine Weideman

### **III. Section Reports**

Descriptive Notes - John Rees

Section Web Site - Diane Ducharme

Finding Aids Fair – Chris Prom

### **IV. Ongoing Business**

2003 sessions sponsored by Description Section – Brad Westbrook

Ideas for 2004 program sessions – Chris Prom

**V. New Business**

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

**VII. Program**

"OAC Digital Objects: Developing best Practices and Relationship with METS".

Robin Chandler, California Digital Library; Adrian Turner, California Digital Library; Genie Guerrard, UCLA Special Collections

A discussion of the Online Archive of California's California Cultures Project as a test ground for exploring the utility of best practices for constructing digital objects and employing the METS standard as a tool for managing digital content. Speakers will explain descriptive practices for digital objects employed in the Cal Cultures project and demonstrate the benefits of developing and applying best practices at the consortial level.

**Section Endorsed Sessions**

**9: EAD Research: Diffusion, Implementation, and Living with Encoded Archival Description (EAD)**

Thursday, August 21

1:30-3:00 PM

The strength of the Encoded Archival Description (EAD) standard grows as more archives move toward having a critical mass of finding aids encoded. Session participants will present research from two national surveys as well as feedback from academic, public, and museum archivists concerning barriers and difficulties with EAD adoption and implementation such as the challenges and successes faced by varying levels of computer and archival knowledge, implementation strategies, and the reengineering of finding aids.

**19. Demystifying EAD: Simple Encoding Solutions for the Layperson**

Thursday, August 21

3:30-5:00 PM

Many archivists, especially lone arrangers, often note that implementing EAD requires enormous expense and technical computer knowledge. This session will focus on demystifying the financial and technical commitments that are necessary for creating EAD finding aids. Workshop participants will demonstrate three readily available tools configured to offer “out of the box” solutions for creating EAD records: Microsoft Word template; NoteTab templates/EAD Cookbook scripts; and Microsoft Access database software. While not dismissing the need for in-depth understanding of the EAD DTD, the participants seek to educate fellow non-technical archivists about the ease of creating an EAD finding aid and to help spur interest and investment in creating EAD records.

**48: Spatial Relationships and Arrangement: Signposts on the Road to Original Order**

Friday, August 22

3:00-4:30 PM

Document containers and museum documentation are devices that communicate meaning. Examining the relationships between original containers and their contents enables archivists to understand better the creators of diverse collections, as well as the creation process itself. The speakers challenge our understanding of what defines archival material in collections by delving into the physical spaces inhabited by National Park Service (NPS) manuscript and book collections; specimens in Harvard University's Warren Anatomical Museum Collection; and Andy Warhol's realia, memorabilia, and ephemera.

**49. All Together Now: Standardization in the Application of Encoded Archival Description (EAD)**

Friday, August 22

3:00-4:30 PM

The Encoded Archival Description (EAD) standard is very flexible, facilitating a wide range of encoding practice. To create consistency in searching and displaying finding aids, several consortial projects and the EAD Cookbook have promulgated protocols encouraging standardization internationally. Speakers will report on an analysis of existing guidelines; describe the standardization behind the United Kingdom's Access to Archives Programme (A2A) and the Research Libraries Group's Best Practices Guidelines; and explain how various initiatives are leading to national application guidelines in France.

## 68. The Online Archive of California: A Model for Integrating Access

Saturday, August 23

3:00-4:30 PM

Focusing on the Online Archive of California (OAC) as an increasingly mature model, this session will examine issues in federating and reconciling description and access practices relating to multiple document formats and user communities. Following a brief overview of OAC's scope and infrastructure, speakers will address using EAD to bridge the differing practices of archives and museums, integrating MARC records and EAD finding aids to provide access to digital content, and employing EAD to describe collectively TEI-encoded books.

## Also Of Interest ...

### Technical Subcommittee on Descriptive Standards

Wednesday, August 20

1:00 PM-4:00 PM

*Continued, p. 5*

## Finding Aids Fair

The wait is nearly over! This Description Section's annual finding aids fair will once again be held at the SAA Annual Meeting. So gather your friends, look for us in the vendor hall, and check out some top-notch finding aids.

The theme for this year's fair will be "Collection Guides: An Old Format Made New". For the past several years, archivists interested in description have put a great deal of emphasis on descriptive standards and on sharing individual inventories in a networked environment. With all the finding aid bits and bytes flying across the internet, one would think that old-fashioned collection or subject guides would have become less prevalent or necessary. But this year's fair will focus on how many archivists are adapting this tried and true format to the age of Internet.

By a collection or subject guide, we mean an interpretive guide or website pointing users to resources found across numerous collections or archives. Such guides may cover the holdings of one institution or many, but they share the common characteristics of offering "one stop shopping" for information on a given topic. They many contain links to finding aids (EAD or non-EAD), but they provide an alternate access mechanism to a simple list of inventories or links from catalog records. They often use a narrative format or interpretive annotations. They may provide an overall map to an institution's resources or a topical guide to resources scattered across numerous collections but sharing a common theme.

Here is a sneak preview of what you will find:

- Immigration History Research Center's Guide to Collections (<http://www1.umn.edu/ihrp/profiles.htm>),
- Nebraska State Historical Society's *Guide to Collections*,
- University of Illinois' *Guide to African American Research Resources*,
- Utah State Archives' *Research Guides* (<http://archives.utah.gov/referenc/!referen.htm#research>),
- Archives of American Art's *Archivos Virtuales: Papers of Latino and Latin American Artists* (<http://www.aaa.si.edu/guides/archivos/index.cfm/fuseaction/CollectionsGuide.Main>)
- Huntington Library's *Striking Pay Dirt: Historical Manuscript Collections Dealing With Mining in the North American West*.

We hope you are able to stop by to view these and other guides, which we hope to have available either both in print format and browseable on a laptop.

**To submit entries contact:**

Chris Prom

Vice-Chair, Description Section  
Assistant University Archivist  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
e-mail: [prom@uiuc.edu](mailto:prom@uiuc.edu)  
phone: 217 333 0798

## Section Officer Candidate Statements

### Vice-Chair/Chair Elect

Kate Bowers  
Processing Archivist, Harvard University Archives

Kate's current duties include overseeing all processing activities in the Harvard University Archives and contributing to digital projects, especially the creation and/or reformatting of resources for the Harvard-Radcliffe Online Historical Reference Shelf (<http://hul.harvard.edu/huarc/refshelf/>).

She is a member of several digital library systems steering committees, including the OASIS Steering Committee, which manages Harvard's intra-institutional consortia EAD site. For SAA, she has been the Chair of the Visual Materials Cataloging and Access Roundtable and she is currently on the College and University Archives Steering Committee. She holds an MSLIS from Simmons College Graduate School of Library and Information Science.

**Voting will take place during the Section meeting.**

## News Notes

### Colorado State University Water Resources Archive

Kelcy Shepherd  
Project Director, Five College Finding Aids Project

Kelcy is managing an EAD and MARC retrospective conversion project involving Amherst, Hampshire, Mount Holyoke, and Smith Colleges and the University of Massachusetts Amherst. In her previous position at the Environmental Design Archives (UC Berkeley) she supervised and assisted with processing, cataloged collections in the MARC format, encoded finding aids in EAD, and collaborated on internal guidelines for description. With Waverly Lowell, she co-authored Standard Series of Architecture and Landscape Design Records: A Tool for Arrangement and Descriptions of Archival Collections, winner of the 2001 C.F.W. Coker Award. Kelcy has given presentations relating to tools and standards for improving access to architectural records, collaborative EAD projects involving smaller repositories, and the challenges and rewards of project positions. She earned her Masters degree in Library Science from Simmons College in Boston.

The Colorado State University Water Resources Archive is pleased to announce the online availability of its finding aids as searchable full text. Please see the revised Web site:

<http://lib.colostate.edu/water/>

The Water Resources Archive consists of collections from individuals and organizations that have been instrumental in the development of water resources in Colorado and the West. The finding aids provide detailed descriptions of each Water Resources Archive collection available to researchers. A list of the collections is available on the Collections page; the interface for cross-collection searching is found on the Search page.

The finding aids were encoded using the XML version of EAD (Encoded Archival Description). They are presented online as HTML files. All future Water Resources Archive finding aids will be added to the Web site as they are completed. Comments and suggestions are always welcome.

Patty Rettig, Head Archivist  
Water and Agriculture Archives  
Colorado State University  
Morgan Library  
Fort Collins, CO 80523-1019  
[prettig@manta.colostate.edu](mailto:prettig@manta.colostate.edu)  
970-491-1844

### **AIP Center for the History of Physics Conducting European Archival Surveys**

The Center for History of Physics at the American Institute of Physics is undertaking surveys of archival collections in physics, astronomy, geophysics and allied fields in Germany and the United Kingdom in cooperation with the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science (Berlin) and the National Cataloguing Unit for the Archives of Contemporary Scientists (Bath). The surveys are funded by a private foundation. We are currently adding approximately 100 catalog records for newly identified collections in the UK to our International Catalog of Sources (ICOS) for History of Physics and Allied Sciences (<http://www.aip.org/history/icos>), and we expect to receive additional records from both surveys. ICOS now contains 7,400 catalog records for primary sources in physics and allied sciences from more than 500 repositories, about two-thirds in the U.S. and one-third abroad.

Please contact Katy Hayes ([khayes@aip.org](mailto:khayes@aip.org)) or Joe Anderson ([janderso@aip.org](mailto:janderso@aip.org)) for information on the surveys or to contribute records to ICOS.



### **Finding Aid Offers A Peak Inside the Gordon Research Conferences**

Andrew Mangravite  
Archivist, Chemical Heritage Foundation

The Gordon Research Conferences (GRC) have long been recognized within the scientific community as the premiere venue for the exchange of scientific ideas. Frequently the conferences address “cutting edge” research topics and many breakthroughs have first been revealed at these conferences. Initiated in 1931 by Neil E. Gordon, at Johns Hopkins University, the meetings moved to Gibson Island in 1934 and were jointly sponsored by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (A.A.A.S.) from 1938 to 1956. Since that time they have expanded in number and scope, with GRC now holding some 180 conferences per year in specific areas of physics, biology and chemistry. As of 1990, the Gordon Conferences are international in scope, though most continue to be held during the summer at a variety of colleges in New England.

One thing that has remained constant is the insistence that all discussions be strictly “off the record.” Consequently the public at large is frequently unaware of the significant nature of these gatherings of what were once referred to as “Dr. Gordon’s

serious thinkers.”

The records that were turned over to the Chemical Heritage Foundation, Philadelphia, PA by the Gordon Research Conferences in 2001 do not “spill the beans” concerning what was said. Nevertheless they provide researchers with invaluable insights into the organization and selection processes which govern the off-the-record content of the individual conferences as well as the nuts and bolts of running the GRC as a scientific organization.

The Records of the Gordon Research Conferences now stand at just under one hundred linear feet with accretions expected at five-year intervals. The present annotated finding aid covers the period 1946 to 1995.

For additional information about the GRC Finding Aid, contact the Chemical Heritage Foundation Archives at [archivist@chemheritage.org](mailto:archivist@chemheritage.org).



*Continued from p. 1*

## **Also Of Interest ...**

### **MicroMARC Users Roundtable**

Thursday, August 21

5:15 PM-6:45 PM

### **Visual Materials Cataloging and Access Roundtable**

Friday, August 22

4:45 PM-6:15 PM

### **EAD Roundtable**

Saturday, August 23

8:00 AM-9:30 AM

### **EAD Working Group**

Sunday, August 24

9:00 AM-12:00 PM

---

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