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The *Journal for the Society of North Carolina Archivists* seeks to support the theoretical, practical, and scholarly aspects of the archival professions by publishing articles and reviews related to curatorial issues (e.g., collection management and development), technical services (e.g., cataloging, processing, digital collections, EAD, preservation, conservation, etc.), and public services (reference, instruction, outreach) for special collections and archives.

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## ABOUT THE COVER

*Nancy Kaiser*

Black-and-white photograph of Elizabeth Brownrigg Cotten (standing) supervising manuscripts processors at the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, ca. 1936.

During the 1930s, the Southern Historical Collection (SHC) received funding support from the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and other government relief agencies to make available its newly established and growing collection of more than one million historical manuscripts to students and scholars of Southern history. A 1936 project proposal to the WPA requested \$5,040.00 to hire female "manuscripts workers" for "arranging, repairing, copying, and filing historical letters, diaries, and other manuscripts." The position, which required a "good general education, training in the handling of manuscript materials, [and] skill in use of typewriter," paid \$35.00 per month.

Today the Southern Historical Collection holds more than 15 million items and stands at the center of inquiry into the South's history and culture. The SHC's collections date from America's late colonial period to the present day. Some individual collections span three centuries and five generations in a single family. The SHC is particularly strong in the antebellum plantation era, Civil War and Reconstruction, and the New South, and it also holds extensive twentieth-century materials. There is almost certainly something for everyone interested in the South and its vibrant history.

a long way from the viewpoint of the New Brunswick historian who wrote a ‘definitive’ history of the province from the transactions of its legislative assembly...” (p. 56).

Archivists, as the keepers of collective memory, must invest the most energy in pursuit of this line of thinking, for Taylor argues, and rightly so, that what we collect is what we keep. What we destroy by not saving influences the interpretations and the outcomes of human history. He gives this occupation an almost spiritual significance. We are no less than cultural shamans, he says in one essay. We have the ability to see that history is not made up of linear events, but that it is inter-connected and circular; it is more than facts and folder titles. We can help others interpret the past—and the present—by making accessible the collections we deem significant for research and by offering our knowledge of social, cultural, and political systems. We can also develop our expertise in what Taylor calls “pattern searching”—finding the connections across format, across institutions—an expertise that librarians share with us. Of course, in another essay he likens archivists to plumbers, a considerably more down-to-earth analogy!

If you would like to find out more about our profession’s origins and its future course, and if you wish to broaden your horizons this fall but do not have the luxury of going back to the classroom, you do not have to reach for Nietzsche or Derrida (though they too have something to offer): dip into this collection of warm and engaging essays written by Hugh Taylor. He is worth getting to know, and his life’s work certainly merits the celebratory nature of this collection.

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## Finding Aids in a Digital World

*Harry Keiner, Ph.D., C.A.*

### Abstract

Today, the term “finding aid” is archival shorthand for collection inventories and registers. They are used by archivists to establish and maintain intellectual and administrative control over a collection and by researchers as the prime tool to access a collection’s contents. The structure of the modern finding aid has evolved over the past thirty years and now includes a recognized order of components. Yet there are no rules governing the writing of finding aids, only guidelines. With the introduction of Encoded Archival Description, a new cataloging standard, the traditional structure and means of producing finding aids has been challenged. This article defends the traditional finding aid and warns against confusing the work of processing archival records and writing finding aids, with the separate task of creating cataloging records in EAD or other metadata standards.

### Introduction

Over the past two decades, the North Carolina State Historical Records Advisory Board initiated surveys to help the board plan activities to further the collection and preservation of the state’s documentary heritage. These surveys consistently revealed that training in basic archival practices and procedures was required in the state’s smaller repositories, particularly for non-professionals who found themselves responsible for collecting, cataloging, and preserving historical records.<sup>1</sup> To meet this need the SHRAB applied for a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission in 2003 to develop, with the assistance of the Education Committee of the Society of North Carolina Archivists, a series of workshops to teach the basics of archival management. The grant application was successful. A project archivist, Matt Turri, a recent graduate of the University of North Carolina’s School of Library and Information Sci-

a true visionary, a man who foresaw the enormous impact of computing technologies—and this in the 1970s, before other archivists were even acknowledging the impact itself let alone the ramifications.

There are three essays in particular that should receive close attention: “The Media of Record: Archives in the Wake of McLuhan” (1978), “Transformation in the Archives: Technological Adjustment or Paradigm Shift?” (1987-1988), and “Chip Monks at the Gate: The Impact of Technology on Archives, Libraries, and the User” (1991-1992). Together, they explore concepts of communication and media and how archivists can begin to think about new forms of media: as archival materials we collect (film, DVDs, email files), and as the tools we use to conduct our daily work (database searching, email, and digitized presentations). He reminds us that the appearance of the vast array of new media formats in our archives means making new connections between these media and communication, society, history, and research, extending beyond the challenges of housing and describing the physical entities. He argues that we should not only spend our time describing the content of the archival materials we collect and process, but also how they came to be, what bureaucratic, legal, or cultural systems created them, and examining what they actually did rather than what they say they did (p. 125). As Terry Cook writes, from Taylor emerges the idea that archives have deep social significance that goes beyond their immediate content, and that we should distinguish between the meaning they gain through their value and the meaning they “make” as cultural products (p. 19).

Taylor constantly and gently warns us against the parochialism and literalism of archival practice, the kind that focuses, nose down, on the classification of archival materials. Taylor would have us look up once in a while and consider the wider picture. How does this archival material fit into the larger picture of what we are collecting, of what historians are studying or may be studying in the future? What is the “ecology” of its significance—in other words, how does it connect to other collections, to other constellations of meaning? Warning against the pitfalls of professionalism and the specialization it sometimes requires, he writes: “We have concentrated too much on techniques, too little on philosophical perception” (p.56). Taylor acknowledges the recent turns in our understanding of historical inquiry:

The historians have already helped us a great deal in our task, and we must learn to respond to their insights. We now see time less as a continuum than as an influence constantly reshaping our present in subtle ways that often escape us; as archivists we are constantly trying to discern patterns rather than impose them, and we are desperately trying not to mistake the parts for the whole. We have come

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postmodernism and Jacques Derrida. It offers few solutions and no firm ground, as all good philosophies should. Unlike Derrida's imaginings, however, Taylor's work is more approachable and manages to be enjoyable and thought provoking at the same time. It should be on every archivist's must-read list, for it accomplishes several tasks at once: It informs the United States archivist about Canadian and English archival history and practice in a few short, interesting essays; it introduces and expands subjects such as McLuhanism ("the medium *is* the message"), the education of archivists, appraisal in the face of the ambiguities and layers of historical truth, and visual arts and their role in the archives; and it forces archivists to puzzle out what it is that they do and why it is that they do it—not just on a daily basis (although he has much to say on this as well), but as professionals working in a historical and cultural context.

*Imagining Archives* may be somewhat of a round peg in a square hole in archival literature, yet it is a celebration of Hugh Taylor's career through his writings. Part one contains two long essays by Canadian archivists Terry Cook and Gordon Dodds commemorating and introducing us to Hugh A. Taylor, a senior manager at the National Archives of Canada who emigrated from England in 1965. (Taylor also served as president of the Society of American Archivists, one of the few Canadian presidents it has had.) Cook and Dodds have collaborated closely with Taylor and owe some measure of their professional growth to his mentoring and friendship. Part two consists of fifteen essays written by Taylor, followed by an after word and two small biographical sections, one on Taylor's life and career, and the other about the editors. Almost all the essays were either published in the journal of the Association of Canadian Archivists, *Archivaria*, or the Society of American Archivists' journal, *American Archivist*; many were originally presentations given at professional gatherings. What makes the essays and the collection especially fascinating are the reflections, written in 2000, that follow each essay. What we are offered through these essays is not only the genesis and development of Taylor's thoughts on the significance of archives and archivists, but also how he looks back at this material on the eve of the twenty-first century. He insists more than ever that there can be a "philosophy of the archives."

Taylor is a humorous, free wheeling writer who is not afraid of self-examination. His fifteen essays are intriguing pieces, if sometimes dense and occasionally rambling, a fact that Taylor admits in his reflections. They span Taylor's career from 1969, shortly after he arrived in Canada, to 1997, a remarkable period for archivists, historians, and the modern world. The essays that explore the brave new world of non paper formats and computing are perhaps his most interesting writings. In these essays, Taylor reveals himself to be

ence, was hired. And, on July 1, 2004, workshop curriculum development swung into high gear.

To accompany the workshops, I volunteered to write a manual that would, in the simplest and most straightforward manner, explain basic archival management concepts and practices from the acquisition of historical records to the dissemination of their contents on the World Wide Web. The heart of this small book, however, is a step-by-step explanation of how to arrange and describe historical records and prepare finding aids to their contents; in short, what used to be called a processing manual. This work has three goals. First, the manual seeks to present best practices of archival management developed by professional archivists over the past fifty years, particularly in the area of arrangement and description. Second, the manual hopes to demonstrate that the processing of historical records is not alchemy and can be learned and successfully performed by anyone with an interest in and an enthusiasm for the preservation of historical records. Finally, the wide dissemination of this manual is recognized as necessary to the establishment of common standards of archival practice throughout the state. Common standards will facilitate the participation by local repositories in collaborative projects to publicize and share their resources electronically, for example through web sites, digital exhibitions, and union catalogs.

Researching the chapters in the manual on arrangement and description has reinforced my long-held view that the narrative finding aid remains the archivist's most important work product. By recording provenance, describing contents, and providing detailed inventories, finding aids are crucial to the management of both institutional archives and the manuscript holdings of a library's special collections. For the archival manager, they establish administrative and intellectual control over the repository's collections. For the researcher, they are the primary tool for conducting research, providing a road map through a collection to the boxes and folders where specific historical information is located.

However, as the archival world moves forward into the twenty-first century, the value of narrative finding aids is being questioned. The emergence of Encoded Archival Description as a cataloging standard has some archivists calling for a revision of the traditional structure of finding aids. Others believe that finding aids can be "generated" from EAD files and suggest that description should occur during processing by filling in EAD-compliant templates. With processing completed, the finding aid will be "assembled" with the push of a button. Together these ideas represent a serious challenge to traditional archival practice and must be addressed by anyone interested in identifying and defining arrangement and description best practices.

## A Brief History of Finding Aids

The origin of the term finding aids as it relates to archives is obscure. Certainly by the middle of the last century, archivists understood that finding aids was a collective term for written descriptions of historical records, as evidenced in an article by William J. Van Schreeven, "Information Please: Finding Aids in State and Local Archival Depositories," published in the *American Archivist* in 1942.<sup>2</sup> This understanding was codified with the publication of *A Basic Glossary for Archivists, Manuscript Curators, and Records Managers* in 1974, which defined finding aids, in ponderous if inclusive words as:

The descriptive media, published and unpublished, created by an originating office, an archival agency, or manuscript repository, to establish physical or administrative and intellectual control over records and other holdings. Basic finding aids include guides (general or repository and subject or topical), inventories or registers, location registers, card catalogs, special lists, shelf and box lists, indexes, calendars, and for machine-readable records, software documentation.<sup>3</sup>

Over the past thirty years this definition has been, in one sense, expanded and, in another, narrowed. To T. R. Schellenberg and the first generation of professional archivists, finding aids were mainly seen as internal documents created to establish physical and intellectual control over a repository's collections.<sup>4</sup> They were written by archivists for archivists. In the 1970s, it was becoming clear that certain types of finding aids were of great value to researchers in conducting their investigations. This shift was noted by the Society of American Archivists' Committee on Finding Aids in their 1976 report,<sup>5</sup> and in the first SAA manual on arrangement and description, written by David Gracy and published in 1977.<sup>6</sup> The recognition that researchers were using a collection's finding aid as the main avenue to its content would have profound effects on their recommended structure.

The narrowing of the conception of the finding aid occurred simultaneously with its broadening audience. As the 1974 *Glossary* definition makes clear, finding aids were considered to be any written document generated to describe collections of historical records: repository guides, inventories, registers, card catalogs, calendars, etc. But, with the publication of *Inventories and Registers* and the 1977 Gracy manual, the idea of the modern finding aid narrowed in the minds of most archivists to mean inventories for the historical records of institutions and registers for manuscript collections. By the 1990s even this distinc-

tics onto her symbolic Dust, which "is about circularity, the impossibility of things disappearing, or going away, or being gone" (p. 164).

Chapter eight is the last chapter of the book, but it does not summarize, conclude, or pull together Steedman's loose theoretical ends. This is another of her unstated jokes: Narrative, especially historical narrative, is like Dust, or rather, is Dust, and this book, *Dust*, is, of course, an example of that. So, *Dust* is about Dust, which is, to a certain extent, about dust: onion-skin layer after layer of symbol and meaning, tangents and leaps and erudition. Granted, this is a practice called semiotics, a technique of thinking and writing about a topic whose practitioners (thinkers Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, and yes, even Derrida and Steedman spring to mind) draw symbolic conclusions from and about the minutiae of human experience that illustrate human experience. In the end, however, the reader is left with a sense of awe at the breadth of the author's ideas and/or a chuckle at their audacity, but without a full belly of oniony knowledge or information.

Consequently (and the foregoing review notwithstanding), I am not sure I grasp what the meaning of this book is. The general readership of this journal will probably not find the theme of these essays germane, in particular because Steedman writes about archives as symbolic, dusty, old, dead places—very different from the practical, dynamic, and changing repositories where we work. However, those readers that enjoy an intellectual challenge and who have read everything else on the nature of History and history writing might want to have a crack at this book. Let me know what *you* think it means! Is "it" really about Dust?

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*Imagining Archives: Essays and Reflections* by Hugh A. Taylor. Eds., Terry Cook and Gordon Dodds. Lanham, Md. and Oxford: Society of American Archivists and Association of Canadian Archivists in association with The Scarecrow Press, 2003. 254 pp. ISBN 0-8108-4771-X (pbk.)

The presence of the word "imagining" in the title of this collection of essays by Hugh Taylor points to what makes these readings unique in the field of published essays on archival practice. The collection certainly does not fall into the category of practical field manuals, but neither does it fully belong to the class of theoretical works on archives and archival practice. We see here a true philosophy of the archives written by an archivist, with some interesting ties to

in “Archive Fever.” This joke is the only one for which she tells us the punch line, comprising chapter two: “Archive Fever Proper,” an occupational disease, or “brain fever” incurred by paper-and parchment-makers, leather workers, and scholars: anthrax, meningitis. And what causes anthrax? Dust. Ahah!

One of the confusing and perhaps irritating things about this book is that, after chapter two, Dust doesn’t appear again until the last chapter. In between are chapters three through seven, essays that describe excursions into the writing of this never-ending, unsatisfying History and the incomplete and often personal records on which it rests. Chapter three details some cases of English eighteenth-century “enforced narration” by slaves, servants, and women caught up in the legal system—narratives of the self that were created by and for and kept by the magistrate or “archon.”

In chapters four, five, and six, Steedman reconstructs the act of writing history as it might have been for several different authors (including nineteenth-century novelists George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell as well as nineteenth and twentieth-century historians Jules Michelet, Raphael Samuel, and George Bachelard) and further illustrates her conclusions about the nature of history: It is a place where the items of the past that have been found in an archive “can be put;” history writers can’t escape their own frame of reference when writing history; and the content of any historical narrative is limited by the writer’s imagination of what could have occurred in the past.

Chapter seven returns to a consideration of self narrative. Steedman notes that not only are those narratives that survive in an archives fragmentary, they also are not often meant to be read, or at least not read by historians. Thus, it is the historian who makes “the stuff of the past (Everything) into a structure or event,” even though the event was never really “there,” in the way a physical object is there (p. 154).

What I believe Steedman is trying to accomplish in this Dust-free, middle part of the book is to illustrate the “dust” of people’s lives and events—what historians are “breathing in” when they work with primary source material. As Steedman writes in chapter eight about Dust, “now, having breathed in the Dust, *knowing about it*,... the implications of this imperishability—this *not-going-away-ness*—of Dust for narrative, force themselves forward (p. 165).

It is in this last chapter where we meet Dust again—having walked several arduous miles around the circular track to arrive at the place where we parked the archival car. Steedman makes the connection between the properties of physical dust—it is always present, always being renewed, and “knows no end” just like the thrax which it induces (p. 161)—and grafts these characteris-

tion had disappeared, and a finding aid simply referred to the standard written descriptive guide for all paper-based historical collections.

The work of the Committee on Finding Aids and David Gracy gave archivists clear guidance to the components of inventories and registers. As Victoria Irons Walch has noted in *Standards for Archival Description: A Handbook*, although this content standard was not adopted by SAA, it became a de facto standard by the wide dissemination of these two publications.<sup>7</sup> This standard became further entrenched by the writing of institutional processing manuals based on *Inventories and Registers* and the Gracy manual. Indeed as a student of archival management at the University of Connecticut, I collected these manuals and took them as guides to my first jobs. I still have one of the best in my possession, *Processing Manual for the Institute Archives and Special Collections, M.I.T. Libraries*, written by Karen Lynch and Helen Samuels in 1981.<sup>8</sup> On page 28 is listed the “Elements of the Inventory” which mirrors the recommendations contained in the SAA publications cited above.

Another means by which the components of inventories and registers were standardized in New England was through the work of Bruce Stark, now Connecticut’s assistant state archivist. In the 1980s Stark was employed as head of manuscript processing at the Beinecke Library at Yale. There he developed an in-house manual, based on another pioneering processing manual written several years earlier by Larry Dowler, under the direction of Dave Maslyn for Yale’s Archives and Manuscripts unit.<sup>9</sup> A member and New England Archivists, Stark taught an NEA workshop on arrangement and description throughout the region during the 80s and 90s using his processing manual as a teaching tool. Stark continues teaching his workshop and handing out copies of the regularly updated manual, now entitled “A Guide for Processing Manuscript Collections.”<sup>10</sup> Hundreds of archivists and librarians from the small repositories of New England have taken this workshop and returned home with a copy of Stark’s manual. My guess is that the New England experience was duplicated in other regions of the country during the same time period.<sup>11</sup>

The standardization of the content of modern finding aids was helped by other developments in the archival world of the early 1980s. Many archivists, particularly those employed by large, research-oriented institutions, determined to develop cataloging standards based on the Library of Congress’s newly developed MARC (**MA**chine **R**eadable **C**ataloging) that would enable the exchange of information about archival holdings through the first generation of large automated library systems. To facilitate this enterprise, the Society of American Archivists established the National Information Systems Task Force (NISTF) in 1977. After analyzing finding aids collected from a variety of institutions, NISTF’s members concluded that no single descriptive system

of finding aids either existed as a model or could adequately serve the needs of researchers. Instead, they turned their attention to discovering which common elements of description were contained in most finding aids. The result was the identification and definition of some twenty common elements shared by most finding aids (or, more correctly, the system of finding aids used by institutions for administrative and reference purposes). These common elements were then compiled and published in a “data elements dictionary.”<sup>12</sup>

NISTF’s dictionary had profound implications for archival cataloging, indeed it may be viewed as the first effort to establish and define a scheme of archival metadata. It underlay the effort to develop a USMARC cataloging standard for archives, the MARC AMC (Archives and Manuscript Control) format, which used the data elements from the dictionary to define the content for the MARC AMC fields.<sup>13</sup>

The final piece of the cataloging standards puzzle was the publication of the first edition of Steve Hensen’s *Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts (APPM)* in 1983.<sup>14</sup> Hensen’s work resulted from the recognition by many archivists that the new MARC AMC format would be unworkable without the development of detailed cataloging rules to govern data entry into the MARC AMC fields. The problem was that the second edition of the *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules (AACR2)*, published in 1978, treated non-book cataloging in general and manuscript cataloging in particular, in ways that were at variance with accepted archival practices. It fell to Hensen to write a manual that would substitute rules based on archival principles for rules based on bibliographic principles; in short, to write a manual that would replace Chapter 4 of *ACCR2* while somehow remaining in harmony with *ACCR2*’s general structure and approach. This was a thankless task, but Hensen succeeded brilliantly. With the publication of a revised edition of *AACR2* in 1987, followed by a second edition of *APPM* in 1989, which included MARC-tagged examples of the rules, archival standards for cataloging were firmly established. *APPM* became the bible for catalogers responsible for creating original MARC records from finding aids of their institution’s holdings. The dream of a mechanism for the exchange of information about archival collections electronically seemed to be at hand.

Why this dream was only partially realized is beyond the scope of this paper; but what is more important is to define the influence that the development of MARC AMC and the accompanying *APPM* had on the standardization of the components of finding aids. Because finding aids are the sources of information for archival cataloging records, *APPM*’s first chapter was entitled “Description of Archival Material.” Hensen assumed that, in most cases, a reg-

about the archival turn. It is about dust” (p. ix).

Although I read these lines at the beginning of my journey through this clever, labyrinthine, and somewhat oblique little book, it was not until I read the last page of the last chapter that I understood what Steedman means by “it” being “about dust.” And, frankly, as she lays out what she is doing, although darkly, in the preface, I actually did not need to read the whole book. Yet, and this is a joke, too—I did not “get it” (or I think I got it) until I had worked my way through all the essays.

Steedman is using “dust” not only as a description for the physical experience of doing research among old, leather-bound and cotton-rag archival manuscripts, but also and primarily as a metonym for the practice and writing of history. However, dust is not history as the moderns view it and have tried to write it—with artificial beginnings and endings narrating people’s lives and events—but rather the essence of History—circuitous and never-ending, just like a dusting of always-accumulating dust. Implicit in this argument is another joke: according to Steedman, what historians have been writing all along is not truly History.

The first two essays of this book move the reader from Steedman’s original starting point, Jacques Derrida’s 1994 paper, *Mal d’Archive: Une Impression Freudienne*, to her description of “archive fever proper,” to dust. In the first chapter, Steedman dissects Derrida’s paper, noting, as have many others, that he uses the *arkhe*, or archive, as a symbol (note: a symbol, again) for the power involved in the creation of knowledge. “Mal d’archive,” as Steedman reads it, is the “desire to recover moments of inception: to find and possess all sorts of beginnings” and thus powerful knowledge (p. 5). The “archive” itself, as a physical location full of physical records, has no place in Derrida’s metonymic conception of the *arkhe*. Moreover, Steedman’s contention is that the English translation of “Mal d’archive,” “Archive Fever,” meaning the desire to find and recover the origins of things, is only one possible ailment that a historian might experience. It is:

only one more item in the litany of complaints that historians have drawn up, in the *uncomfortable* quest for original sources that the new practice of ‘scientific’ history inaugurated, in the middle of the nineteenth century, and which is still the dominant idea of practice among modern, professional, Western historians (p. 10).

Steedman’s joke, then, is to insist on “finding both the Archive and the Fever” (p. 10)—that is, different kinds of archives and fevers than Derrida intended—



I was also mildly disappointed with some of the case studies themselves. I have always found case studies to be a valuable educational tool, but I found some of the situations proposed a bit dated and some of the contributor's courses of action in response too black-and-white. Ethics presents a number of "gray" areas and, at least for several case studies, I would have liked to have seen more flexibility in the contributor's response.

However, the work does have some highlights and valuable contributions. The first case study in the book presents the classic situation that all archivists and curators who solicit collections encounter at some point in their career—the donor who wants an appraisal of a gift without employing an outside party. Timothy Ericson gives an added twist to this scenario along with a thoughtful commentary. Mark Greene's case study on copyright (case 17) gives a timely example of the ethics of reusing web content from an outside source. The section on deeds of gift (cases 18–20) with studies by Ericson and Greene also supply great examples of handling situations with donors requesting restrictions and about missing legal agreements for collections. The privacy section (cases 29–32) gives good examples of situations involving third-party privacy issues, confidential information, and family members (who are not the donor of the collection) requesting restrictions.

While a bit dated, the suggested readings at the end adds a good supplement to the case studies for those who want more information. If you can get past its shortcomings, the book has many valuable points to recommend it. Any text that encourages more thought and discussion of professional ethics deserves some kudos. I hope that the editorial problems evident in this volume are rectified prior to a reprinting of this work.

Tim Pyatt  
Duke University Archivist  
Chair, SAA Privacy & Confidentiality Roundtable

*Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* by Carolyn Steedman. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002. xi, 196 pp. Bibliography. Index. Soft cover edition. ISBN 0-8135-3047-4.

The subtitle of this book would lead one to believe—especially if one is an archivist—that this book is about archives and history. In her acknowledgements, Carolyn Steedman acknowledges that she intended to "make an argument for the Archive and the recent 'turn to the archive' in the human sciences" (p. viii). Yet, as the first of many "jokes," twists, and turns taken by Steedman in the course of the book, she cheerily notes in her preface that the book "turned out not to be

ister or inventory had been written that included the components defined by the Committee on Finding Aids and the Gracy manual. Hence, *APPM* called upon catalogers to add notes on Biographical/Historical, Scope and Content/Abstract, Organization and Arrangement, and Provenance. But, it is clear from his instructions that Hensen wished catalogers to abstract this information from the finding aids. For example, he demanded that the cataloger creating a Biographical/Historical note, "record *briefly* [italics added] any significant information..."<sup>15</sup> His examples of these notes read like catalog cards, full of sentence fragments and proper nouns. Clearly, catalogers were not supposed to cut and paste prose sentences from finding aids:

Historian, of Wilson, Raleigh, and Chapel Hill, N.C.; first archivist of the United States; secretary, North Carolina Historical Commission; professor at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill; and author.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, the coming of MARC AMC and *APPM* reinforced the standards for the organization and contents of inventories and registers, rather than attempting to alter or modify the schemes promoted in Gracy's manual and its successor, Frederic M. Miller's *Arranging and Describing Archives and Manuscripts*, published by the SAA in 1990.<sup>17</sup>

### The Narrative Finding Aid—Its Nature

Well-written finding aids do not resemble cataloging records because they are created from a completely different perspective. Catalog records, as we have seen, are brief and succinct, and they must follow a strict set of rules. A cataloging record is created by a deductive process that leads to a predictable result; that is, its method is scientific. If two well-trained catalogers create a MARC record from the same finding aid, the result should be two very similar records. In contrast, the process of writing finding aids is an art, shaped by the knowledge and skill of the archivist, and by the material being examined, organized and described. Gracy, always the preacher, made his feelings very plain on this matter in the introduction to his manual:

Arrangement and description, like painting, are processes, means to an end. The end is ready accessibility of the information in the materials arranged and described. Each collection and record group is unique, each exhibits its own personality, and the archivist strives to describe each collection in a manner reflecting the activity that created it. Always the archivist seeks to learn the history of a collection or record group before beginning work on it, but rarely is the data supplied by the principals of the collection or record group. Some phases of arrangement, like some techniques of portraiture, are prescriptive,

but, taken as a whole, neither arrangement nor painting is ever rote. As the artist selects the medium—water color, oil, charcoal—most suited to his subject and as he inevitably highlights certain characteristics in a portrait, so too does the archivist choose descriptive media for, and emphasize attributes of, every collection and record group. And when all is said and done, it is an unusual collection or record group that is not changed—though its usefulness is improved—through archival processing, through arrangement and description.<sup>18</sup>

Finding aids, then, are created by an intellectual process distinctly different from cataloging. The process is inductive, demanding that much information be gathered and considered before one begins their composition. The page is always blank. There are no rules to follow, only guidelines that suggest how they should be organized. Library schools tend not to teach courses in the composition of finding aids, and they are certainly not critiqued as literary works. Yet, that is their essential nature.

The guidelines for writing good finding aids are contained in the processing manuals of many research libraries, state archives, and other large institutions. They all have their particular quirks and idiosyncrasies, reflecting the prejudices of their authors; but, for the most part, they follow a set format. They usually begin with an introduction to processing at the repository that should probably be subtitled “how we do it here.” This is followed by suggestions for researching the provenance and contents of the collection or record group and writing a processing plan. The next chapter usually discusses options for arrangement, including how to select the overall scheme, divide materials into series and subseries, and the preferred order of types of materials (e.g. correspondence, writings, financial and legal materials, subject files, etc.). A chapter on description then follows, providing the processor with the sequence of the finding aids’ components and their contents. A concluding chapter might discuss preservation activities, mainly the proper use of boxes and folders and the creation of labels that will insure ease of locating materials and forestall misfiling after researcher use.

One of the best of these “modern” processing manuals, in my opinion, is *How to Proceed: A Procedures Manual for the Southern Historical Collection and General and Literary Manuscripts, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*, originally written by Lynn Holdzkom and Tim West in 1989, but regularly revised by Holdzkom throughout the 1990s. The current version, rewritten by Holdzkom and Linda Sellars, was issued in 2000.<sup>19</sup> There is much here to praise and admire. The introduction contains some noble statements regarding the nature of the processor’s work and its importance, while reminding us all

## REVIEWS

*Ethics and the Archival Profession: Introduction and Case Studies*, by Karen Benedict. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2003. 90 pp. ISBN 1-931666-05-9, \$34.95.

As someone who believes ethics should be a key component of archival education and professional practice, I have been looking forward to this volume. Benedict has assembled an all star cast of archivists to present case studies and supply commentary. The book uses the Society of American Archivists’ code of ethics as its framework, presenting the case studies in topical fashion. While the code is presently under revision, it is not expected that the main points will alter greatly, so this remains a good structure.

Benedict starts the volume by placing the professional ethics for archivists in the context of other professions and by also differentiating ethics from professional conduct, legal issues, and institutional practice. Her comments make a good introduction for the case studies and set the parameters for the subsequent discussion.

Unfortunately after this strong beginning, the book does not quite live up to expectations. It reads like a book that needed another editorial pass before publication. A number of irritating problems exist with the text as reviewed. Most notably, the pagination of sections in the book differ from what is listed in the table of contents. Most sections are off by three pages, with the first chapter starting on page 4 instead of page 1 as listed. Benedict’s commentary is divided into an introduction (p. 1) and four chapters (pp. 4-21). The forty case studies appear by categories in bold headings taken from the SAA code of ethics. The table of contents lists seventeen bold headings for the case studies, but there are actually nineteen headings in the book. The headings skipped—“Complaints about Other Institutions” and “Competition for Collections”—are topics the reader may specifically be interested in, but would be unaware existed without reading the entire book. As these two topics are among the main points being considered for revision in the SAA code of ethics, it caused this reader to speculate whether they were a last moment addition before printing. The case study headings are not numbered or otherwise labeled, which also adds to the confusion. The lack of an index for the book exacerbates the problems with the table of contents since it is the reader’s only guide to locating specific content.

<sup>7</sup>SAA, “Annual Meeting Information, Birmingham 2002,” <http://www.archivists.org/conference/birm2002/birm2002prog.asp>, accessed June 30, 2004.

<sup>8</sup>Sir Hilary Jenkinson, *Selected Writings of Sir Hilary Jenkinson* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2003), 224–25.

<sup>9</sup>Randall Jimerson, “Margaret Norton Reconsidered” in *Norton on Archives*, Margaret Cross Norton. (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2003), xiv.

<sup>10</sup>Margaret Cross Norton, *Norton on Archives*. (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2003), 86–87.

<sup>11</sup>Norton, *Norton on Archives*, 89.

<sup>12</sup>Norton, *Norton on Archives*, 249.

<sup>13</sup>T. R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2003), xviii.

<sup>14</sup>Schellenberg, *Modern Archives*, 5.

<sup>15</sup>Schellenberg, *Modern Archives*, 13.

<sup>16</sup>Jimerson, “Margaret Norton Reconsidered,” xli.

<sup>17</sup>Jenkinson, *Selected Writings*, 399–42.

<sup>18</sup>Terence M. Eastwood, “Introduction to the 2003 Reissue,” in *Selected Writings of Sir Hilary Jenkinson* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2003), vii.

that some of the tasks of arrangement and description are, well, boring:

A good deal of processing is cerebral—developing an arrangement scheme, writing the description, selecting access points—but it also entails work that is mundane and most decidedly unglamorous.... From time to time, nearly every one of us in manuscripts work experiences moments of despair when the amount of detail work threatens to overwhelm. When this happens, it may be helpful to remember that the papers we process will soon become the ‘stuff’ of history. Each one of us is a link in a long chain of knowledge that stretches from the lives of the men and women who created the papers to the eventual users of the manuscripts....<sup>20</sup>

The manual stresses the importance of documenting what the archivist finds as research and arrangement proceeds: “As you work through the collection, you will take notes on everything, chiefly to record information that you will need when you write your finding aid.”<sup>21</sup> There are also words of wisdom for “visioning” the finding aid before writing begins. In particular, the manual’s authors make the point that the finding aid must follow the overall scheme of arrangement:

Consider the image of the processor as cartographer, for it is through describing that the collection’s “map” comes into being. The collection finding aid you create is the map that will lead researchers to and into collections that may interest them.

Arrangement underpins every description. Arranging establishes the intellectual and physical contours of the collection. While arranging, you anticipate describing your collection in terms of its arrangement scheme. Get the arrangement down, and description will follow.<sup>22</sup>

As for style in writing a finding aid, the manual’s authors quote a statement made in 1926 by Robert B. House of the North Carolina Historical Commission as a proper starting point: “Write pithily and attractively, but with absolute truth and unchangeable regard for historical truth and accuracy.”<sup>23</sup>

### The Narrative Finding Aid—Its Contents

The components of inventories and registers have been modified little since they were first codified by the Committee on Finding Aids’ *Inventories and Registers* and Gracy’s *Archives & Manuscripts*. The following list of compo-

nents and the description of their contents is drawn from many sources, including Frederic Miller's SAA manual and a number of institutional processing guides.

- Finding aids have TITLE PAGES OR COVER SHEETS that are set up according to institutional standards. Often, to assist cataloging, these standards directly follow *APPM* guidelines. Title pages and cover sheets usually include the following data elements. The first is the Title of the collection or record group. This is sometimes followed by an institutional control number. The second element is the Dates covered by most of the records. This is usually followed by an element identifying the Creator of the collection or records group. The final element is a statement of Extent providing an estimate of the collection's size. Other information presented on title pages and cover sheets may include the name of the repository, contact information, the author of the finding aid, and date of publication.
- Title pages or cover sheets are followed by a TABLE OF CONTENTS that is prepared after the finding aid has been written. It is usually organized according to the main heads of each component: Preface, Scope and Content, Arrangement, etc.
- A carefully written PREFACE is the next finding aid component. It contains administrative information that should be presented in the following order. The first paragraph explains the provenance of the collection—how it was acquired and who it was acquired from, including the history of ownership and dates of transfer. The second paragraph provides the reader with a statement regarding copyright. The third paragraph sets forth the correct citation statement for researchers, including the collection's title, the unit name, repository name, and (if necessary) the institution name. The fourth paragraph discusses restrictions on access, including prohibitions on copying certain parts of the collection and procedures to be followed prior to the use of audiovisual materials. The fifth paragraph contains processing notes, which may include a statement regarding the level of processing; the source of outside assistance, such as a granting agency; or parts of the collection that have been filed separately from the main body of material, such as oversized photographs or blueprints. The sixth paragraph discusses the location of associated records and describes their relationship to the collection. A seventh paragraph notes the existence of microfilm or digital copies of the collection or parts of the collection. Finally, an eighth paragraph notes the creation of MARC records, EAD records, and the URL of the finding aid on the repository's web site.
- The fourth component of the finding aid is the ABSTRACT. This serves

“tangible and intangible matters.” He then discusses at length the intangible, or what he deems the “essential elements”: the reason for a record's creation and the value in its preservation.<sup>15</sup> It is in the elucidation of this second element that we see outlined today's discrimination of values such as artifactual and intellectual value as we assess the long-term preservation of our materials.

## Conclusion

In examining these works together, an interactive discourse surfaces. Jenkinson refers directly to the three Dutchmen. Norton adapts Jenkinson's theories in her writings, particularly that of the distancing between archival professionals and scholars in the role of keepers of archives.<sup>16</sup> Schellenberg acknowledges the contributions that Jenkinson and the Dutchmen made upon his thinking by interacting directly with their ideas through his own writing. In 1956, Jenkinson reviewed Schellenberg's work. These are a few that immediately surrounded them. They began to decode the profession through their writings.<sup>17</sup>

For graduate students of archives, these works do indeed form the core of archival theory as it is in practice today. But for the professional, the works provide an opportunity to return to fundamental theories, to understand the dialog that took place before those theories were firmly in place, and to visit a time when everything was not settled. As Eastwood says of Jenkinson, “remote as they may be, these essays reveal a lifetime devoted to almost every aspect of the archivist's professional endeavor. Reading them helps us appreciate the timeless preoccupations of the archivist, who may encounter novel circumstances but rarely an entirely new concern.”<sup>18</sup> This statement could be valid for any of the four volumes examined here. In addition, there are gems within—thoughts that were visited by these archival greats and recorded to share with us, their archival heirs.

## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup>Phillip Eppard, *American Archivist* 66 (2003): 233.
- <sup>2</sup>SAA, “Guidelines for a Graduate Program in Archival Studies,” [http://www.archivists.org/prof-education/ed\\_guidelines.asp](http://www.archivists.org/prof-education/ed_guidelines.asp), accessed February 17, 2004.
- <sup>3</sup>S. Muller, J.A. Feith, and R. Fruin. *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives*. Translation of the second edition (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2002), xxxii.
- <sup>4</sup>*Describing Archives: A Content Standard* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2004), xi–xv.
- <sup>5</sup>Muller, Feith, and Fruin, *Manual*, 19.
- <sup>6</sup>Muller, Feith, and Fruin, *Manual*, 100.

of the management of those records. Embedded in her argument about archivists and records managers is a discussion of the permanent record and the issue of disposal of records as they arrive in bulk: "It is not difficult to decide the value of records two hundred years old, but it is a grave responsibility to try to make a correct decision about records only five or ten years old. The archivist is reconciled to having to house badly planned files already in existence, but he hopes wistfully that records management can avoid such problems for the future."<sup>12</sup> Norton argues that records managers and archivists should embrace a relationship that is active in the preservation of the permanent record rather than strictly reactive from the archivist perspective. We see the results of this kind of thinking in the increasing frequency of records managers located within archives' organizational structures in today's institutions.

### **T. R. Schellenberg: Coming Full Circle, But Reinventing at the Same Time**

T. R. Schellenberg is perhaps the best-known American archival theorist. His work, *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques*, was assigned for scores and scores of archives students and most likely populates the reference collection of archives and library special collections more frequently than any other work. The introductory essay, as with the other works, places his work as a measuring stick against which other archival theorists are measured.

Most notable in this work is Schellenberg's use of comparison to strengthen his analysis of archives in the United States: "In contrasting the principles and techniques followed in the United States with those of other countries, my sole purpose is to make clear their essential nature."<sup>13</sup> Though he uses comparison, Schellenberg does not consider judgment as part of that task. This comparative method provides a framework in which Schellenberg interacts with the principles and practices of archives.

One gem in Schellenberg's work rests in his first two chapters, "Importance of Archival Institutions" and "Nature of Archives." As with Norton, he sees archives as public property with legal responsibilities. In trying to understand the conception of archives, he refers to the origins at the end of the eighteenth century: "Throughout the French revolution records were recognized as basic to the maintenance of an old society and to establishment of a new."<sup>14</sup> This tension between the records of the past and their usefulness to the present is evident throughout his work.

Schellenberg's focus on issues of vocabulary, including such terms as archive and record, provides a comparative view of definitions that highlight both

two purposes: first, as an introduction to the collection's contents; and second, as the starting point for a cataloger to construct a MARC record for the repository's online catalog or to mark up the finding aid into EAD. Abstracts should be written last since they are summary in nature. They should be concise and to the point, explaining the overall importance of the collection and noting significant people, corporate bodies, events, and subjects (e.g. "these diaries provide a singular glimpse into the world of a Civil War surgeon."). Based on the abstract, some processing manuals call for the definition of Library of Congress Name and Subject Headings as access points to the finding aid, again as an aid to catalogers. This is tedious work, although LC's new authorities web site makes choosing correct names and subjects much less burdensome than in the past. But not everyone has these tools available, and most catalogers prefer to read the finding aid and choose headings based on their experience. Personal names, corporate bodies, and subjects will all be brought out in the components of the finding aid, so leaving the choice of access points to a cataloger is certainly acceptable.

- The next finding aid component is the BIOGRAPHY /ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY. This is one of the major prose compositions within the register or inventory. It is a series of paragraphs, an essay really, that provide a history of the persons, family, or organization that created the records. If the finding aid is the register of a manuscript collection, the composition will provide a comprehensive portrait of the person, persons, or family members who produced or collected the records (e.g. correspondence, diaries, photographs, etc.). These individuals should be brought to life not only by providing the circumstances of birth, marriage, and death, but also by accurately placing these lives in the context of their times through the description of important events in an individual's career, explaining the role and importance of certain associates, and by highlighting accomplishments and honors. If the finding aid is an inventory of an agency, office, department, or other entity within a broader organization, then the administrative history will describe the founding of the parent institution by explaining its mission, goals, and accomplishments; highlighting its activities, products, responsibilities, and methods; and noting important structural changes that shaped the organization's evolution. The writer should then turn to the narrower functions of the agency, office, or department that created the records. Accomplishments should be noted that were particularly important to the organization's success. Reporting relationships and the role of particularly important managers need to be explained. A very useful means of summarizing biographical or administrative history information is to add a timeline of important events after the explanato-

ry paragraphs. Also, a bibliography of published and unpublished sources used in writing the Biography or Administrative History should be included.

- The sixth component is the SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE. If the Biography/Administrative History describes the creators of the records then the Scope and Content Note describes the records themselves. That is, it is a composition that provides the researcher with an overview of the collection in relation to its creator or creators. It can begin by explaining the types of material the collection contains and then provides both the overall dates covered and bulk dates (or date ranges where most of the records are concentrated). Soon, though, the writer should turn to the heart of the matter, describing the research value of the collection. Which parts of the collection help explain why events occurred or why decisions were made? Which records provide avenues to understanding larger historical trends, themes, or movements? In short, the writer should try to place the creators and their records in proper historical context. The weaknesses of the collection should then be noted, such as gaps in documentation. Connections to other collections in the repository or elsewhere should be emphasized, along with published works whose themes the collection will reinforce, or perhaps contradict. When the researcher finishes reading the scope and content note he should have been guided through the collection and made to understand its potential as a resource for historical evidence.
- The seventh component is the ORGANIZATION AND ARRANGEMENT NOTE. Some processing manual writers add this information to the Scope and Content note, but arrangement should really be considered separately. This note can be brief, but it should provide an overview of the arrangement scheme of the collection. It is certainly helpful to discuss here instances when the original order of the collection has been abandoned and an artificial arrangement imposed. The note should end with a list of all series and subseries numbers and titles, with inclusive dates.
- SERIES DESCRIPTIONS are the eighth component. Some manual writers consider the description of the collection's series, and related subseries, to be a finding aid's most important element. For example, Frederic Miller calls them "the heart of an archival inventory."<sup>24</sup> They are certainly important, particularly when the collection is very large and is arranged in a large number of series. Indeed, some institutions create a MARC record for each series of large collections to keep the record's length to manageable proportions. However, it is best to let the

ars—the "professional" context that archivists today take for granted. His analysis of her work is so insightful that even if you have previously been exposed to Norton's works this article deserves attention.

*Norton on Archives* gives a full range of the topics that Norton wrote about during her career. Like the Jenkinson work, this is a series of articles and presentations that she gave throughout her career, dating from 1930 to 1956. Typically, the chapters comprise more than one presentation on a particular topic. In this way, they are organized in topical rather than chronological order, beginning with two chapters that examine the place of archives ("The Scope and Function of Archives" and "The Purpose and Nature of Archives") in society. This format provides the reader with a sense of development on particular ideas rather than an analysis of her personal development. This is a realistic and useful organization to pursue her thinking on specific topics. Following the main body of the text is a chronological listing of the original publications for those interested in understanding the complete development of her approach to archives.

Two chapters deal with the archivist in relation to other sibling professions. "The Comparison of Archival and Library Techniques" and "The Archivist and Records Management" illustrate the groundwork that Norton laid for the cross-professional roles that these sibling professions play in preservation and access to information. In the former, Norton argues that a contrast between the libraries and archives centers on the kind of collections they hold: "Theoretically, at least, many copies of the books are in existence so that the contents of one library can be, and frequently are, duplicated in whole or in part by other libraries... the archive comprises chiefly, though not necessarily exclusively, manuscript material... The quality which distinguishes an archive from a library is its uniqueness."<sup>10</sup> The similarities that surface in her analysis focus on the connection between the users and the institutions. She states: "the public served, though it may be somewhat different in personnel, makes little distinction between archives and libraries when it comes to use.... The average user of the archives thinks of the institution primarily as a reference library and, without personal interest in the techniques used in achieving the results, he wishes to be able to use the library and the archives interchangeably."<sup>11</sup> This acknowledgement that archives and libraries are viewed in tandem by the public and that the methods used to provide access to the materials should be transparent makes the companionship between the two professions complete.

The latter chapter, "The Archivist and Records Management," provides an even stronger connection between the archivist and a sibling profession. Norton argues that the archivist's primary concern is with the permanent record, while the records manager is part of the creation of records and therefore part

Expert Care of Archives: Dangers of the War and Post-war Periods” and in 1943 and 1944 he continued to write on British records and the impact of war. What is so striking about these essays is not just the timeliness that they have now as the world faces war and terrorism—perhaps not of the same proportion but with the unpredictability that must have been felt at that time—but also the example of an archivist who studied the context within which he practiced his profession and how he reconciled the profound nature that this context was to have on the short and long term.

The parallels of the struggles described in Jenkinson’s writings about war and those of the horrific situation of the National Archives near the World Trade Center in New York during the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, are eerily similar. At the 2002 annual conference of the Society of American Archivists in Los Angeles, a plenary presentation, “Witness to History: Archivists and the World Trade Center Disaster,” brought to light the impact of such events on archives and archivists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>7</sup> Of the London Blitz, Jenkinson wrote:

But after 1938, when there were still many who could not believe, until it occurred, that even Germans would go to the length of absolutely indiscriminate air-bombardment, preparation was a practical matter.... Even as I write the enemy is talking much of new terrors in store. We merely record thankfulness mixed with our grief for past losses, and hopes for the future. It is the motto of the Cockney in 1940: ‘Go to bed hopeful and wake up thankful.’<sup>8</sup>

Reviewing Jenkinson’s thoughts during his experiences in World War II should give us all food for thought as to how to better prepare ourselves for the crises of today.

### **Margaret Cross Norton: Essays That Uncover Her Impact**

Almost single-handedly she nudged the American archival profession away from the domination of scholars and into an independent identity that included service to records as both historical documents and, more importantly in her view, as legal records vital within the domain of government administrators.... her approach to archival problems was fundamentally pragmatic, based on experience and experiment rather than on abstract theory.<sup>9</sup>

Thus states Randall Jimerson in his essay “Margaret Norton Reconsidered” reprinted in the “Archival Classics” series edition. Jimerson focuses on the impact of Norton in defining the profession of archivists as distinct from schol-

collection and its contents dictate the importance of series descriptions. If the collection contains records, even in large numbers, whose arrangement is straightforward and whose contents are homogeneous, then series descriptions can be short and uncomplicated.

- Each series description begins with the number, title, and inclusive dates from the list at the end of the arrangement note. Next, the series’ physical contents are described: the number of boxes and folders and the types of materials. This is followed by a note on the arrangement of the series. The description concludes with a carefully written explanation of the series’ intellectual contents, including specific references to the principal subjects, events, people, places, functions, and activities that the records document. The goal here is to describe the records, not their creators, whose lives or administrative histories have already been thoroughly discussed.
- The final finding aid component is the CONTAINER LIST, usually organized by box number, folder number, and folder title. This enumeration usually follows each series description. The container list for a particular series may be interrupted by subseries descriptions and accompanying box and folder numbers and titles. Folder titles should be carefully chosen and as descriptive as possible, always including date ranges and/or bulk dates. The author believes strongly that explanatory notes following a title are very useful if the folder title fails to convey the importance of the records contained within.

### **Finding Aids and the Future of Archival Description**

After some thirty years of development, today’s narrative finding aid is a useful tool for archival description. One of its main virtues is its flexibility. It can be modified to suit the needs of almost any type of repository: library special collections, business archives, local historical societies, government archives, etc. Moreover, because they focus on content and are not rigidly formatted, finding aids can be written to describe whatever you find when you open up a record center carton or a shoebox tied together with a piece of string. This point is clearly made in *How to Proceed*:

In section 5.1 of this manual, we indulged in a bit of archival humor when we used the adjective “typical” to modify the noun “finding aid.” Since manuscript collections are largely composed of unique items, there can be no typical collection, no typical arrangement, and, therefore, no typical finding aid. Hence, we rely on the flexibility of our finding aid format that

permits description and cataloging of almost any collection, whatever its arrangement.<sup>25</sup>

Another strength of narrative finding aids is that their structure remains relatively simple to teach and learn. Lone arrangers managing small, poorly funded repositories, some without even a semester of graduate archival or library training, can be taught how to write serviceable inventories and registers.

However, it is the very flexibility of the finding aid format, together with its emphasis on well-written, sometimes lengthy, prose descriptions of collection creators and content that has caused some in the archival community to look to a future when finding aids would be replaced by something with a more rigid structure based on stricter definitions and standards. The current critique of finding aids and the process of their creation is an outcome of the development of Encoded Archival Description (EAD), a system of metadata designed to make the content of archival collections fully and easily searchable on the World Wide Web. In many ways, this attack should remind older archivists of certain aspects of the debate over the development and adoption of MARC AMC in the early 1980s. EAD, like MARC AMC, is essentially a cataloging standard. The developers and proponents of EAD, like MARC AMC, are mainly employed in the special collections of large, well-funded, research-oriented universities. Most of these institutions are members of the Research Library Group (RLG), and have staffs large enough to allow specialization, particularly in the area of archival cataloging. EAD, like MARC AMC, is fully supported by the Library of Congress and the leadership of SAA.

EAD is a very complicated system of metadata, particularly in its latest incarnation, EAD Version 2002. Most working archivists are interested in its capabilities, and welcome it as a new cataloging standard for marking up their finding aids. Even if they feel unready at the present time to participate, many hope that their finding aids will eventually be converted, either by a vendor or a particularly adept staff member trained at an EAD workshop. A glance at *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*,<sup>26</sup> the APPM for EAD, will convince anyone that the creation of EAD records is best left to an expert.

The problem is that some proponents of EAD see it as something more than a cataloging standard. In their view EAD should also become a descriptive standard and revolutionize the content and structure of finding aids and the methods of their production. In two volumes of the *American Archivist* written to introduce EAD to the archival community,<sup>27</sup> some worrying signs over where some proponents of EAD were headed were evident. In an essay boldly entitled "EAD as an Archival Descriptive Standard," Kris Kiesling did not mince words:

lection and of deriving from what is learned about it the principles for its arrangement.<sup>5</sup>

The aversion to dictating a perfect archival arrangement structure is reflected in today's descriptive standards. Instead, arrangements are directed by the archives, or organisms, themselves.

The second principle, that description serves as a guide, focuses on accessibility through description rather than detailed rendering of the documents within the collection. In the commentary the authors state: "The guide to the archival collection must not seek to make consultation of the collection itself superfluous."<sup>6</sup> This emphasis has been extended in archival practice by differentiating the role between description and interpretation. The seasoned as well as the novice archivist will benefit from being reminded that finding aids are tools constructed by archivists to aid the researcher in their process rather than a reflection of the archivist's assessment of a collection.

### Sir Hilary Jenkinson: A Collection of His Essays

Jenkinson's work is starkly different from that produced by the three Dutchmen. While this is not a coherent work produced as his reflection on archives, there are some interesting components to this collection of essays that continue to resonate today. The work also includes several essays on areas of particular interest to Jenkinson and important to English archival science. These include "Paleography and the Practical Study of Court Hand" (1924), "Some Notes on the Preservation, Moulding and Casting of Seals" (1925), "Medieval Tallies, Public and Private" (1925) and "The Study of English Seals" (1937). These articles clearly delineate the kind of archives Jenkinson interacted with in his career and his interest in the material. They demonstrate the connection between the objects and the profession in a way that seems lost to today's archivists. As evidenced by the recent spate of publications on electronic resources, we are again entering a world where we must understand the inherent nature of the material in order to provide adequate access and preservation. The relevance of these articles rests not only in what we can learn from Jenkinson's understanding of these materials, but from his tenacity and scholarship in exploring the nature of the object to provide better contextual guidance for patrons.

Also notable in the collection of Jenkinson's writings is a focus on the impact of war on archives. In 1939 he wrote "The Choice of Records for Preservation in Wartime: Some Practical Hints," as if preparing for the onslaught of war that would embroil the world and reconcile archival practices with the practicality of choice that is forced upon societies in crisis. In 1941, he followed with "The



tions that transcend technologies and provide ideas that are dynamic rather than simply once-off solutions to local problems. The position of “classic” cannot be easily or light heartedly doled out, and it is evident through the review of these works that the editors of SAA Publications were judicious in their inclusion of these four works.

### **The Three Dutchmen: Muller, Feith and Fruin and Their *Manual***

This work is primarily organized and geared toward administrative or organizational archives. However, general principles extant today are outlined first here. As noted in the *Manual's* introduction, these principles were codified in the *Manual* but were not created out of thin air.<sup>3</sup> The principles are outlined in numeric order, from 1 to 100. It is telling that the newly produced *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* (2004) cites Muller, Feith and Fruin in the formation of its general principles, although the authors have reduced the number from 100 to 8 for relevance to nonorganizational records.<sup>4</sup>

Extensive commentary written by Muller, Feith and Fruin accompanies each principle in the *Manual*. It is within these commentaries that we are able to revisit the principles that form the foundation of archival arrangement and description. For instance, evidence of the concept of original order (principle 10) and *Respects des Fonds* (principles 16 and 50) can be found amongst these 100 principles. The commentary provided feels both comfortable and enlightening.

The continued relevance of the *Manual* is highlighted in two principles (2 and 37). The first, the archive as an organic whole, centers on the concept that the creation of archives through the activities of an administrative body is not an artificial construct, but a living organism, and that the archivist is usually interacting with an organism that lived at some time in the past. In the commentary, they state:

If the functions of the body change, the nature of the archival collection changes likewise. The rules which govern the composition, the arrangement and the formation of an archival collection, therefore, cannot be fixed by the archivist in advance; he can only study the organism and ascertain the rules under which it was formed.... Consequently, in the rules which follow there is careful avoidance of giving any scheme for archival arrangement and grouping. Every archival collection, be it understood first of all, must be treated in its own way, and this manual has no other purpose than to suggest the means of becoming acquainted with the structure of a col-

Just as the MARC format was the mechanism that provided a consistent structure for archival cataloging records and set archivists on a course of acceptance of a host of bibliographic standards, *so EAD will now be the impetus that leads us toward standardizing the structure and possibly the content of finding aids* [italics added], and it may well unite the international archival community in the process.<sup>28</sup>

Near the end of her essay, Kiesling recommended an upcoming article by Dennis Meissner as an example of how “repositories can at least take advantage of the establishment of the standard data structure that EAD provides by using it *to model their paper-based finding aids* [italics added]”<sup>29</sup>

Meissner’s essay was entitled “First Things First: Reengineering Finding Aids for Implementation of EAD.”<sup>30</sup> An archivist at the Minnesota Historical Society, Meissner began by criticizing his own institution’s traditional model for writing inventories and registers as incompatible with the presentation of archival information through EAD on the Web. Frustrated because Google and other commercial search engines were directing impatient “customers” into the middle of encoded pages, Meissner and his colleagues decided to radically alter the structure of their finding aids.

The problems we found can be summarized by stating that our previous finding aids did not explain themselves, their purpose, or their contents well enough to permit a reasonably intelligent customer to understand and use them effectively without the intercession of an archivist. This is not to say that they were poorly written, or inaccurate, or that their descriptions of collections were incomplete. Rather, *the problems lay in the way they were structured, ordered, and presented information. The effect of these problems... would be magnified tremendously when the finding aids were delivered* [through EAD] *over the Web* [italics added].<sup>31</sup>

This effort, then, would be a “root-and-branch” reform, a dismantling of the narrative finding aid form with its carefully crafted sentences and expository style in favor of a structure predicated on the imperative that it would be easily searchable:

Technology consultant Michael Hammer has written that ‘at the heart of reengineering is the notion of discontinuous thinking—of recognizing and breaking away from the outdated rules and fundamental assumptions that underlie operations.’ This was our strategy as our task group began recon-

sidering the composition of our finding aids. We made every attempt to start with a blank piece of paper—to forget as much as possible the comfortable look and feel of our collection descriptions and to try to think from scratch about the purpose of each information element in the finding aid, and whether each, in fact succeeded in its purpose. As we tore apart the existing finding aid model, we simultaneously began to build a new model that would more optimally structure and present descriptive information.<sup>32</sup>

This new model finding aid would not be so much written as assembled from content entered into forms, in strict compliance with EAD cataloging rules, now codified in *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*.

We are producing our finding aids in Microsoft Word for Windows 95 and have created a set of three templates to accommodate our basic finding aid types. The archivist writing the finding aid enters text into a skeleton document, associating the various finding aid components with particular text and formatting styles. The styles comprising each template correspond to EAD tags.<sup>33</sup>

Meissner then explained at great length the complicated process of parsing and then converting the finding aid into an EAD-tagged document. This product was then converted back to HTML for display on the MHS web site. In an understatement, Meissner noted that “the reengineered finding aid model... carries some significant overhead.”<sup>34</sup> He continued, “the additional labels, boilerplate text, and formatting structures impose an additional burden on either clerical and professional staff in producing each finding aid.”<sup>35</sup> Still, Meissner maintained that the result was worth the effort and he predicted that “... a finding aid reengineering project is a necessary precursor to any large-scale plan for implementation of EAD.”<sup>36</sup>

A similar project to reengineer finding aids to make them more EAD-friendly is underway at the University of California, Berkeley. In a similar manner, finding aids will be prepared using templates from which completed documents, a text version, and a fully-encoded EAD version will be produced. “We are investigating a variety of options for incorporating EAD directly into the authoring process, including a complete suite of MS Word templates and macros, dubbed EAD Stylus, and available as part of the toolkit.”<sup>37</sup>

Efforts to reengineer finding aids in the manner described above are suspect for a number of reasons. First, they collapse two very distinct tasks, writing a finding aid and cataloging a finding aid, into one job. This will create neither better finding aids nor better EAD cataloging records, because the two processes are essentially different. The very nature of writing finding aids, as de-

## Visiting with Old Friends *SAA's Archival Classics Series*

Katherine Wisser

### Introduction

In 2003, the Society of American Archivists Publications began a new “Archival Classics” series that republishes the foundational works in the archival profession. Included are such classic titles as *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives* by Samuel Muller, Johan Feith, and Robert Fruin; compilations of writings by Margaret Cross Norton and Sir Hilary Jenkinson; and T. R. Schellenberg’s *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques*. In the Winter 2003 issue of the *American Archivist*, editor Phillip B. Eppard introduced a new feature for the journal, introductory essays for this “Archival Classics” series. These essays remind us of the importance of these works and provide invaluable context in understanding not only the professional development of individual archival theorists, but also their interplay with each other in the realms of ideas. The series of republications in the *American Archivist* should stimulate interest in these classics while whetting an appetite for more theoretical discussion among the Society of American Archivists’ leading thinkers today.

In introducing this new feature, Eppard provides a context for the “Archival Classics” series and states that “many key works of archival literature have gone out of print, and the growth of archival education programs suggested that there might be a steady new market for these books.”<sup>1</sup> This statement suggests that students of the profession will be the primary beneficiaries of these republications. This coincides with an increasing awareness that graduate education in archives is on the rise and that the graduate curriculum needs attention.<sup>2</sup>

For archivists, though, these classics are old friends. What relevance does a republication have for us? In examining these works, I found principles taken for granted were refreshed and challenges that seemed resolved continued to provide appropriate frameworks for today’s issues. These works contain asser-

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 387.

<sup>37</sup>“EAD history,” University of California, Berkeley Digital Collections, [http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/digicoll/bestpractices/ead\\_history.html](http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/digicoll/bestpractices/ead_history.html).

<sup>38</sup>Meissner, “Reengineering,” 375.

scribed earlier, is a creative, artistic endeavor. It is organic in the sense that it follows the contours of the scheme of arrangement, contours that differ remarkably from collection to collection. It is therefore antithetical to a “fill in the template approach” following strict rules for content. Finding aids are written, not “authored.” In contrast, the job of the cataloger marking up a finding aid in EAD is to pull the prose apart, selecting data elements for inclusion, and adding them to the EAD record in compliance with *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*. The nature of this work is rigorously scientific, deducing correct forms of entry from a strict set of rules. By maintaining separation between these two tasks, narrative finding aids will continue to be written and EAD records, marked up to the highest standard, will be produced.

Second, one of the premises for reengineering finding aids is false, namely that they are confusing to researchers and are difficult to use “without the intercession of an archivist.”<sup>39</sup> Frankly, in my experience, most people who come to search rooms catch on to the scheme of things pretty quickly once they know the repository’s procedures and where the finding aids are located. Arriving at a finding aid following a web search, whether the document is marked up in EAD or HTML, or presented as a Word or PDF document, might indeed confuse a researcher if the text is, say, a folder title from a container list. To make sense of the text, the researcher must backtrack to the beginning of the finding aid and read forward to understand the context of what the search engine has delivered. Will all web “customers” want to do this? Probably not. Will some expect to actually see the document, photograph, or drawing described? Sure. Will they be able to do so for the vast majority of materials stored in repositories with web sites? No. In short, archival collections and their accompanying finding aids neither exist for, nor can be easily accessed by web surfers casually Googling around the Internet. Narrative finding aids are meant to aid serious researchers find *and understand* the content of collections, and assess their potential usefulness. Repositories post their finding aids not to supply the general public with factoids, but as a convenience to researchers searching for collections of value to their projects and planning trips to reading rooms.

## Conclusion

Writing a manual to teach the basics of archival management to non-professionals has forced me to look carefully at certain fundamental principles of archival arrangement and description. From the preceding pages, the reader has learned of my fondness for traditional narrative finding aids as the best, most flexible tool for describing collections of historical records. In my view, the arrival of EAD is a welcome development providing rigorous if very complicated, standards for *cataloging* archival finding aids. But the imperative for producing excellent EAD records must never be the driver of an effort to reengineer finding aid structure and content. That would put the cataloging cart in

front of the describing horse.

Rather, archivists must work to perfect the writing of narrative finding aids. We must teach young archivists and non-professionals how to *process* records and prepare inventories and registers based on guidelines developed and refined over a thirty-year period. Then, depending on the repository, the nature of its parent institution, and available resources, cataloging records can be created from the finding aids, based on the most appropriate system of metadata: Dublin Core, MARC, or EAD being the most obvious choices. In the end better finding aids and better cataloging records will be produced by maintaining separation between these very different tasks.

### REFERENCES AND NOTES

<sup>1</sup>For example, following the state-wide survey sponsored by the SHRAB in 1992, the report issued the next year noted five areas of concern, the third of which was "Education Needs." Under this heading, the first explanatory bullet stated, "there continues to be a major need for basic archival education—especially for the smaller repositories." State Historical Records Advisory Board, *To Secure our Legacy: The Future of North Carolina's Documentary Heritage* (Raleigh, NC: 1993) : 4.

<sup>2</sup>William J. Van Schreeven, "Information Please: Finding Aids in State and Local Archival Depositories," *American Archivist* 3 (July 1942) : 169-78.

<sup>3</sup>Frank B. Evans, Donald F. Harrison, and Edwin A. Thompson, comps., *A Basic Glossary for Archivists, Manuscript Curators, and Records Managers*, ed. William L. Rofes (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1974) : np.

<sup>4</sup>Laura A. Knodel makes this point in her excellent master's thesis. See, Laura A. Knodel, "The Evolution of Archival Description at the Southern Historical Collection" (masters thesis, University of North Carolina [Chapel Hill], 2004), 8-9.

<sup>5</sup>Committee on Finding Aids, *Inventories and Registers: A Handbook of Techniques and Examples* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1976).

<sup>6</sup>David B. Gracy II, "*Archives & Manuscripts: Arrangement & Description*," Basic Manual Series (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1977).

<sup>7</sup>Victoria Irons Walch, *Standards for Archival Description: A Handbook* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1994), 4.

<sup>8</sup>Karen T. Lynch and Helen W. Slotkin [Samuels], *Processing Manual for the Institute Archives and Special Collections MIT Archives* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1981), 28.

<sup>9</sup>Information supplied by Bruce Stark, email to Hal Keiner, June 30, 2004.

<sup>10</sup>Bruce Stark, *A Guide for Processing Manuscript Collections* (Hartford, Conn: n.p., 2001).

<sup>11</sup>For a discussion of the influence of the Gracy manual on changes in the

Southern Historical Collection's processing practices, see Knodel, "The Evolution," 26-28.

<sup>12</sup>On the work of NISTF and the compilation of the data elements dictionary, see Walch, "Standards," : 4-5.

<sup>13</sup>The MARC AMC format was officially sanctioned with the publication by the Library of Congress of *MARC Formats for Bibliographic Data*, Update No. 10, in 1985. Ten years later MARC AMC and all separate formats for other library materials were collapsed into a single integrated format, now MARC 21.

<sup>14</sup>Steven Hensen, comp., *Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts: A Cataloging Manual for Archival Repositories, Historical Societies, and Manuscript Libraries* (Washington, DC: The Library of Congress, 1983).

<sup>15</sup>Steven Hensen, comp., *Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts: A Cataloging Manual for Archival Repositories, Historical Societies, and Manuscript Libraries*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1989), 24.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>17</sup>Frederic M. Miller, *Arranging and Describing Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1990).

<sup>18</sup>Gracy, *Archives & Manuscripts*, 2.

<sup>19</sup>Lynn Holdzkom and Linda Sellars, *How to Proceed: A Procedures Manual for the Southern Historical Collection and General and Literary Manuscripts*, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, rev. ed. (Chapel Hill: n.p., 2000).

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 7. I would only emphasize that the archivist who writes a well-researched narrative finding aid is the *key* link in the chain, for it is he or she who has created access to the collection's contents.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup>Miller, *Arranging and Describing*, 95.

<sup>25</sup>Holdzkom and Sellars, *How to Proceed*, 57.

<sup>26</sup>*Describing Archives: A Content Standard*. (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2004).

<sup>27</sup>See *American Archivist* 60, no. 3 (Summer 1997) and *American Archivist* 60, no 4 (Fall 1997).

<sup>28</sup>Kris Kiesling, "EAD as an Archival Descriptive Standard," *American Archivist* 60, no. 3 (Summer 1997), 345.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 352.

<sup>30</sup>Meissner, "First Things First: Reengineering Finding Aids for Implementation of EAD," *American Archivist* 60, no. 4 (Fall 1997).

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 375.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 373-74.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 386.