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The Technology Side of Archives: Encoding Archival Description (EAD)

Archival collections have been notorious for their inaccessibility and restrictive character, a storage house where only the archivist has a good idea as to what is really in the collections and how to get to them. Modern technologies have alleviated some of these barriers between the archives and the rest of the world. A descriptive document, appropriately defined as a finding aid, is the main access point for most of these materials. Among these new technologies, the advent of the online public access catalog (OPAC) and a coding language named MARC (MACHine Readable Code), libraries increased both search and retrieval abilities required to access materials, at least without a great deal of browsing. Unlike standard library record entries, however, archives must describe their entries at a collection level rather than at a typical item level. Because of this, archival records are much more specialized and unique from record to record that the need for an archival coding language eventually became apparent.

In Jimerson's "American Archival Studies : Readings in Theory and Practice," Daniel Pitti wrote a chapter describing the brief history of a search for a coding language for archival materials. The earliest specialized standard to become available to the archival world was developed in the early 1980s by the National Information Systems Task Force and released in 1984. Known as the MARC Archival and Manuscripts Control (MARC-AMC) format, it provided an encoding standard that was later used in conjunction with a descriptive standard known as the Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts (APPM) rules. However, because MARC-AMC was designed for use with MARC and thus were brief bibliographic records, finding aids were still necessary in order to give a more detailed description of the collections. Work to create a standard for the finding aids began using the MARC language as a key example. While MARC is a descriptive language that labels each element of a record rather than processes it in a specific way, the use of numerical tags makes MARC less intuitive to the human user. Pitti lists three other reasons why MARC was concluded to be a poor encoding standard for archives: restricted character length, ill-designed for hierarchical data, and a general lack of funding to implement it.

However, a non-library language already existed that provided tremendous flexibility. Standard Generalized Markup Language (SGML) was a tagging system that validated itself to a Document Type Definition (DTD). Anyone could create their own set of tags to describe different types of intellectual content. Two sub sets were developed from the expansive SGML language – HTML (HyperText Markup Language) and later on XML (EXtensible Markup Language). HTML was created when a need for a standardized DTD became apparent to produce documents with a visual layout to the Internet. Because HTML was "dumbed down" so greatly from the very powerful descriptive abilities of SGML, a simplified version of SGML was created in XML. XML still mandates a DTD to be declared in its documents where most browsers will assume a document is HTML for the most part. In 1995, Daniel Pitti devised a team to create a coding language using the SGML/DTD format. After receiving the Bentley Fellowship, his team was able to develop a schema very similar to what another library group was

doing in creating the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI). This essentially means two different sections of metadata were created: a “header” that contained administrative information about the creation of the finding aid and the metadata for the actual finding aid. This new DTD was then named the Encoded Archival Description (EAD) standard.

The first release of EAD was in 1996 and was available from either the University of California, Berkeley or the Library of Congress. As more users began implementing the new language, several modifications needed to be made to the DTD and its guidelines. Version 1.0 was released in 1998 after the working group received several suggestions, and was modified once again in 2001 with the deprecation of eight of the version 1.0 elements. With XML’s introduction in 1998 and growing popularity as a simplified web-based version of SGML, several more modifications were made to the tag set in order to meet the XML standards resulting in EAD 2002 (official website can be found at: <http://www.loc.gov/ead/ead2002.html>).

A number of the tags in EAD are required to have a valid document. Looking at the EAD version 1.0 Application Guidelines (EADAG) since as of this date the official EAD 2002 is still unavailable, a section is dedicated to describing how to create a finding aid using EAD and explains what each tag is used for. A visual sample of the required tags for version 1.0 can be seen in Appendix A. To begin, it must start with the <ead> tag. It must be followed by the <eadheader>, previously mentioned to contain the administrative data about the finding aid including information about language, creation, author, and title. Inside the <eadheader>, <eadid>, <filedesc>, <titlestmt>, and <titleproper> are all required. <archdesc> is the main tag that encompasses the actual finding aid content. It can be given a hierarchical structure that finding aids are best known for by using the “level” attribute that is required for this tag. Within the <archdesc> tag, a descriptive id <did> tag is required but optional at other levels. It contains information regarding the repository, origination, title of the unit, date of the unit, physical description, and abstract, although none of these tags are required. Most of the required tags are administrative metadata, leaving the rest of the finding aid extremely flexible. While this flexibility is very useful for the unique collections described using EAD, it does cause some compatibility issues with other metadata schemas.

This was taken into account when designing EAD 2002. The RLG has created a Best Practices Guideline document with a list of the tags assigned a particular status as the RLG saw best fit to standardize finding aid appearance. This relied a great deal on a framework known as the General International Standard Archival Description (ISAD(G)), an international set of rules that was meant to improve upon the available rules provided by APPM and the AACR2r. It was revised to a second edition in 1999, and so became a very important document in the improvement of EAD. The five levels of status assigned by RLG are as follows: required (necessary for validation), mandatory (required by the RLG Advisory Group), mandatory if applicable (RLG mandated only if applicable), recommended (recommended best practice), and optional. Comparing version 1.0 to the 2002 required fields as stated by RLG, all the required fields are the same except for a few additions if creating a finding aid at the item level, not a common practice among archivists. When the list of mandatory elements is added to the list, however, the number of necessary elements increases from 9 basic collection level elements to 54 total elements. To get a better idea of how this affects its compatibility with other metadata schemas, with the original 9 basic elements none of the tags had a comparable tag in MARC 21 or Dublin Core (DC). With the 54 elements, several fields find equivalents.

Among these are MARC 21's 041, 050, 090, 099, 245, 260, 500, 546, 653 fields and DC's Title, Creator; Contributor, Publisher, Date, Description; Subject, Language, Type, Title, Identifier, and Language. It becomes very apparent that including these RLG mandatory elements may prove useful for sharing information.

To summarize thus far, in order to produce an accessible document to an archival object, three standards must be used: MARC-AMC to tie it to a library catalog using MARC, APPM as a set of rules similar to what the AACR2r does for library materials, and EAD to create a complete descriptive finding aid. As the finding aid contains the most descriptive version of a surrogate record for an object, it would be the most likely candidate to use to share information with others. Unfortunately, because it is such a flexible language, it does not lend itself to search tools that have been created to "harvest" metadata. Prom's article published in Library Hi Tech looks at this issue with a number of samples while his more extensive article published the previous year by the Journal of Archival Organization provides a case study of incorporating finding aids with the Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting (OAI-PMH). As Prom states, "union catalogs cannot be built with records that do not share a minimal level of uniformity." The most general argument is that many institutions do not implement any standards yet, and he sees the OAI as a way to make descriptions standard and easily exchangeable.

The OAI uses XML as the coding language of its documents, so those using the EAD built on SGML model already have a configuration problem. In the EADAG a process has already been provided in converting SGML based systems to XML. In 2000, May Chang describes why XML was becoming the preferred coding language over both SGML and HTML. Her argument for not converting a document using HTML was simply HTML was too function-specific instead of content specific. XML provided the extensibility, structure, and validation that allowed for flexibility and functionality. Different displays could also be incorporated as the tags were not visually structural in natural and could be manipulated using different XSL (EXtensible Stylesheet Language) style sheets. At the time of the article not many authoring tools existed for XML, but companies were moving from SGML to XML tools. Currently several programs exist including XMetaL and XMLSpy. Using SGML as the coding language required an application to take the SGML and convert it into an HTML document on the fly. This was limiting both by the application needed to parse the tags and by the ease of changing the visual layout. XML is simply a more flexible, portable, and integrating language to use as it clearly describes and presents a contextual hierarchy and is easily visually manipulated.

Another problem that may be encountered in trying to standardize for OAI compatibility is in what it harvests. OAI displays its information using Dublin Core, a much less descriptive and structured metadata schema that fails to provide any indicator of provenance and original order. With a finding aid, this is the most detrimental action one can take. However, in many cases two surrogate records exist: the MARC-AMC bibliographic record and the EAD finding aid. Since a MARC to DC map has already been created and is available from the Library of Congress, the simplified MARC-AMC records can be used in the OAI-PMH. However, they do not provide nearly as much usefulness as a finding aid would. Some research has been done in order to find a way to maintain context of a finding aid after harvesting into DC. Prom (Reengineering) tested a new XML tag known as the XPointer tag to include a hyperlink back to a URI (a URL

that is persistent and stable) of the original XML finding aid document. Although linking to the original document as a way to keep material in context is useful, it also causes search display problems by showing those materials out of context until the user clicks on that hyperlink. Proper guidelines to using this are still underway as a balance between file size and accessibility are being determined. A slightly smaller issue is that DC produced from EAD does not indicate whether that object is available online or digitized, limiting the searching capabilities for those only seeking online materials. Another display issue occurs with relevancy ranking according to that object's location in the collection's hierarchy. The overall display using this method confused many users, and so needs further development. Using OAI's DC standards and RLG's recommended elements for EAD 2002 would help improve the access of these records, although several inherent problems still exist with the manner of display and harvesting as mentioned above.

As if to answer this dilemma of expanded access, a new project was announced by the University of Chicago titled Finding Aid Discovery, scheduled to begin the first quarter of 2005. The Library of Congress decided the DC element set was insufficient, so in 2002 they produced a modified set of tags that could capture many more of the MARC records while still providing a simplistic design such as DC. This new metadata schema is known as Metadata Object Description Schema, or MODS. Instead of directly harvesting an EAD document and attempting to crosswalk it into DC, the University of Chicago will be taking the MARC-AMC record and extracting those mapping them to the closer related MODS elements. This technique, while it creates yet another surrogate record of the collection, ensures less data loss. The OAI-PMH is able to then read the MODS document that can have a hyperlink to the entire finding aid. A sample record of what a MARC-AMC record translated into MODS looks like is available at <http://oai.lib.uchicago.edu/?verb=ListRecords&metadataPrefix=mods&set=ead> (also available as Appendix C) or simply go to the MODS official webpage to read more about the project under its implementation list. While this is not the most desirable method because it produces three end documents – the MARC-AMC record, EAD finding aid, and MODS conversion for OAI-PMH harvesting – it does increase collection records' presence as the library and archival community continue to collaborate in standardizing mark up schemas.

Overall the method of creating a library record with MARC-AMC and a finding aid with EAD has worked at an institution level. What needs to be done now is standardize the minimum amount of content for each finding aid so that it can be easily crosswalked with other metadata schemas such as DC and MODS and used in other search engines as federated searching (such as Google and Yahoo have provided) becomes a predominant research method. The RLG has provided a basic layout in its guidelines to show a basic connection with elements in MARC 21 and DC, suggesting elements that crosswalk between some of the more basic elements in those languages become mandatory thus increasing the interoperability and overall usefulness of the records outside of its native environment. Doing so will not only promote accessibility, but will also promote the existence of those collections as well as the institutions that house them. With the ability to search records outside of an institutional box and at a global level, researchers will also be able to find all relevant material regardless of location. Standards and search engines still have a considerable amount of work in order to accurately depict the special needs of archival materials, and to do so while also

searching non-finding aid material along side that is even further down the road. However, by incorporating the new EAD 2002 using the ISAD(G) and APPM rules on the XML coding language, institutions are increasing the possibility to attain a more uniform method of searching and displaying archival materials in a meaningful and understandable format.

Bibliography

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http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/digicoll/bestpractices/ead_history.html Last updated: 6/26/2003. Accessed on 11/12/2004.
- RLG EAD Advisory Group. "RLG EAD Best Practice Guidelines for Encoded Archival Description." RLG, Inc. <http://www.rlg.org/rlgead/bpg.pdf>. Last updated 8/01/2002. Accessed on 11/12/2004.

Appendix A: Sample EAD version 1.0 Containing Required Elements in Bold
 (http://www.loc.gov/ead/ag/agappa.html)

```

<ead>
  <eadheader>
    <eadid>
    <filedesc>
      <titlestmt>
        <titleproper>
          <author>
          <publicationstmt>
          <publisher>
          <date>
      <profiledesc>
        <creation>
        <language>
        <language>
    <archdesc> with LEVEL, LANGMATERIAL, and LEGALSTATUS attributes
      <did>
        <repository>
          <corpname>
        <origination>
          <persname>, <corpname>, <famname> as
appropriate
          <unittitle>
          <unitdate>
          <physdesc>
          <unitid> with COUNTRYCODE and REPOSITORYCODE
attributes
          <abstract>
        <admininfo>
          subelements as appropriate
        <bioghist>
        <scopecontent>
        <controlaccess>
          subelements as appropriate
        <dsc> with TYPE attribute
          <c0x> or <c> with LEVEL attribute in as many
levels as appropriate
          <did>
            <container>
            <unittitle>
            other subelements as appropriate
  
```

Appendix B: Sample EAD 2002 Containing Required Elements in Bold
 (http://www.rlg.org/rlgead/T3minmkA.html)

```

<ead>
  <eadheader>
    <eadid type="SGML catalog">
      <filedesc>
        <titlestmt>
          <titleproper>[finding aid title]
            <date>
              <subtitle>
                <author>
          <editionstmt>
            <edition>
          <publicationstmt>
            <address>
              <addressline>
                <date>
                  <num>
                  <p>
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        <revisiondesc>
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          .
          .
          .
          <title>
          <unitdate>
          <unittitle>
        <archdesc language="en" level="collection" langmaterial="en">
          <did> [labels below only for top-level <did>]
          <head>
            <unittitle label="title">
              <unitdate type="inclusive">
            <unitid label="collection id">
              <origination label="creator"><persname> or <corpname>
            <physdesc label="extent">
            <repository label="repository"><subarea><address>
            <physloc label="location">
            <abstract label="abstract">
            <note>
          .
          .
          .
  
```

Appendix C: Sample MARC-AMC record translated to MODS for OAI-PMH
 (http://oai.lib.uchicago.edu/?verb=ListRecords&metadataPrefix=mods&set=ead)

```
<OAI-PMH xsi:schemaLocation="http://www.openarchives.org/OAI/2.0/
  http://www.openarchives.org/OAI/2.0/OAI-PMH.xsd">
<responseDate>2004-12-02T15:41:20Z</responseDate>
<request verb="ListRecords" metadataPrefix="mods"
  set="ead">http://oai.lib.uchicago.edu/</request>
-
  <ListRecords>
-
    <record>
-
      <header>
<identifier>oai.lib.uchicago.edu:ICU.SPCL.wpaepcke</identifier>
<datestamp>2004-10-14T00:42:01Z</datestamp>
<setSpec>ead</setSpec>
</header>
-
      <metadata>
-
        <mods:mods xsi:schemaLocation="http://www.loc.gov/mods/v3
  http://www.loc.gov/standards/mods/v3/mods-3-0.xsd">
-
          <mods:titleInfo>
<mods:title>Papers, 1912-1961 (inclusive)</mods:title>
</mods:titleInfo>
-
          <mods:titleInfo type="alternative">
<mods:title>Paepcke, Walter P., papers</mods:title>
</mods:titleInfo>
-
          <mods:name type="personal">
<mods:namePart>Paepcke, Walter Paul, 1896-1960</mods:namePart>
</mods:name>
<mods:typeOfResource collection="yes" manuscript="yes">mixed
  material</mods:typeOfResource>
<mods:genre authority="aat">Photographs.</mods:genre>
<mods:genre authority="aat">Motion pictures (visual arts).</mods:genre>
-
          <mods:originInfo>
-
            <mods:place>
<mods:placeTerm type="code" authority="marccountry">xxu</mods:placeTerm>
</mods:place>
</mods:originInfo>
-
            <mods:language>
<mods:languageTerm type="code" authority="iso639-2b">eng</mods:languageTerm>
```

</mods:language>

-

<mods:physicalDescription>

<mods:extent>66.5 linear ft. (133 boxes)</mods:extent>

</mods:physicalDescription>

-

<mods:abstract>

Consists of biographical material, correspondence, subject files, financial documents, publications, scrapbooks, ledgers, newspaper clippings, a movie, and photographs. Includes information pertaining to the Container Corporation of America, a business founded by Walter Paepcke in 1926. In addition to materials that refer to Paepcke's paperboard container business, the papers also document some of his philanthropic, cultural, and educational interests. Included among them is the Goethe Bicentennial Foundation, which organized a festival in 1949 to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Included among Paepcke's other cultural and educational activities are materials relating to the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies. The AIHS, founded in 1950, became an intellectual and cultural center of continuing education that provided seminars, lectures, and forums conducted by leaders in commerce, industry, science, education, religion, and government.

</mods:abstract>

-

<mods:note>

Box 133 contains correspondence by Paul Nitze which is restricted during his lifetime. A researcher must obtain prior written permission from Mr. Nitze to consult his correspondence. Series VI includes a small container located in Box 131 that holds a reel of movie film. This film is currently restricted due to the condition of the material or need for special equipment.

</mods:note>

-

<mods:note>

Consists of biographical material, correspondence, subject files, financial documents, publications, scrapbooks, ledgers, newspaper clippings, a movie, and photographs. Includes information pertaining to the Container Corporation of America, a business founded by Walter Paepcke in 1926. In addition to materials that refer to Paepcke's paperboard container business, the papers also document some of his philanthropic, cultural, and educational interests. Included among them is the Goethe Bicentennial Foundation, which organized a festival in 1949 to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Included among Paepcke's other cultural and educational activities are materials relating to the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies. The AIHS, founded in 1950, became an intellectual and cultural center of continuing education that provided seminars, lectures, and forums conducted by leaders in commerce, industry, science, education, religion, and government.

</mods:note>

-

<mods:note>

Cite as: Paepcke, Walter P. Papers, [Box #, Folder #], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

</mods:note>

-

<mods:note>

Businessman, philanthropist. Born 1896. B.A. Economics and History, Yale 1917.
Founded Container Corporation of America. Died 1960.

</mods:note>

-

<mods:note>

Finding aid available in the Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago
Library, 1100 E. 57th St., Chicago, IL 60637.

</mods:note>

-

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-

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 <mods:name type="personal">
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-

```

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</mods:subject>
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http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/ead/ICU.SPCL.wpaepcke
</mods:url>
</mods:location>
-
    <mods:accessCondition type="restrictionOnAccess">
Box 133 contains correspondence by Paul Nitze which is restricted during his lifetime. A
researcher must obtain prior written permission from Mr. Nitze to consult his
correspondence. Series VI includes a small container located in Box 131 that holds a
reel of movie film. This film is currently restricted due to the condition of the material
or need for special equipment.
</mods:accessCondition>
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-
    <about>
-
    <oai_dc:dc xsi:schemaLocation="http://www.openarchives.org/OAI/2.0/oai_dc/
http://www.openarchives.org/OAI/2.0/oai_dc.xsd">
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No rights to the use of these metadata are granted except
by prior agreement.
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</oai_dc:dc>
</about>
</record>
</ListRecords>
</OAI-PMH>

```